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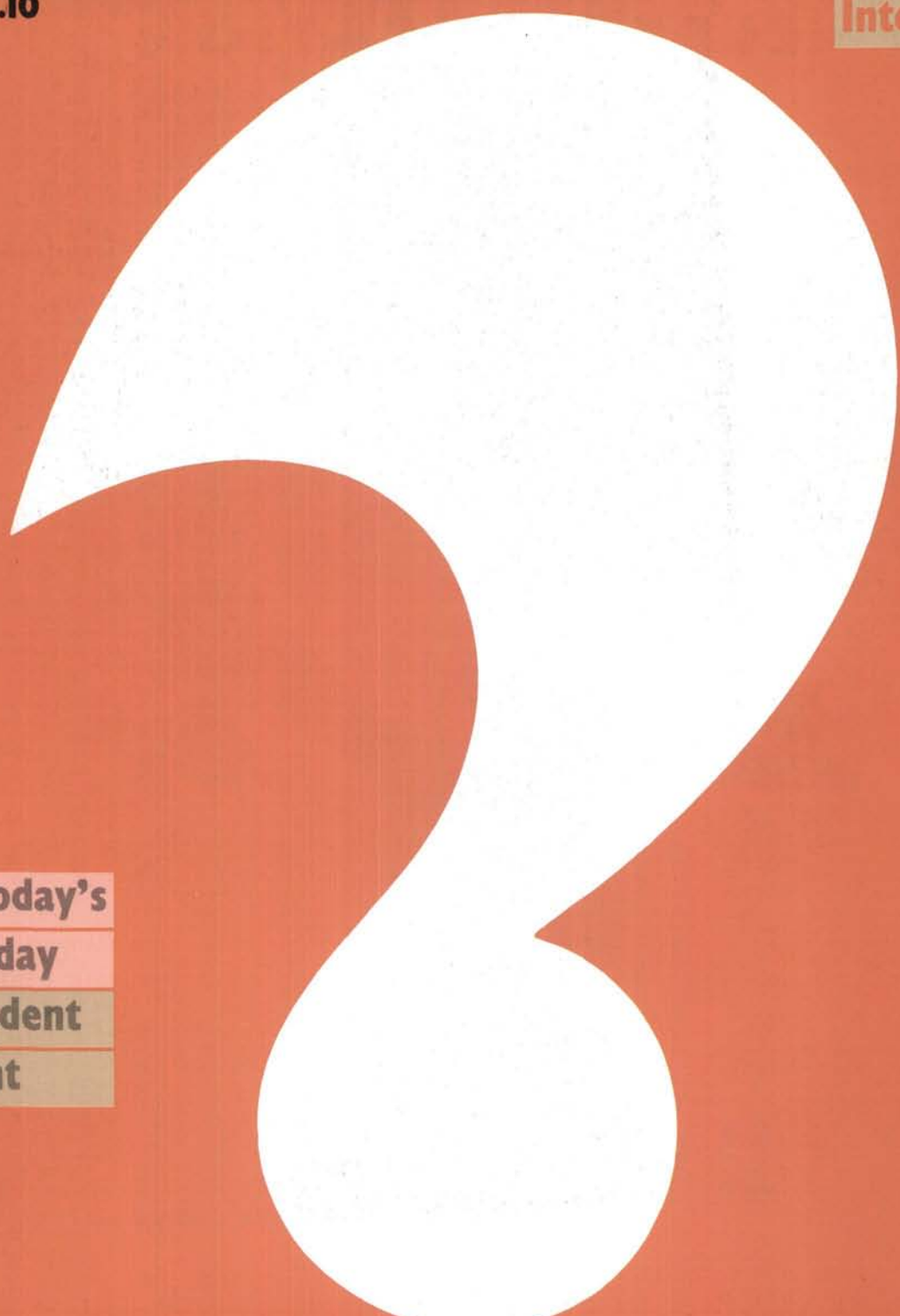

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British Blueprint

Following its confirmation in office on June 11, the government lost no time in turning its manifesto promises into legislative commitments. The Queen's speech on June 25 outlined 17 bills which the government hopes to enact during the present parliamentary session which, because of the election, will last 16 months.

Some of these bills, like the criminal justice bill, had not completed all their parliamentary stages, so were lost when the election was called. Others are relatively minor pieces of legislation. But among the rest there are some highly controversial and radical measures.

The Conservative manifesto contained more major legislative commitments than most oppositions put forward. This is a considerable contrast with the Conservative manifestos of 1979 and 1983, both of which made very few specific commitments. In 1983 there were commitments to legislate to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties and to make union political funds subject to ballot, but there was little else.

The approach in 1987 was very different, and as the Queen's speech showed it was not simply rhetoric for the hustings. After three clear election victories the confidence of the government and of the prime minister is higher than ever. Ministers are aware that in many areas the Thatcher revolution has been long on rhetoric and short on achievement. The prime minister is determined that her government should be remembered as a radical reforming administration; one that made a permanent difference to the way in which Britain is governed.

The government is cramming most of the new legislation it wants to get through into this first session. The only two major measures that appear in the manifesto but not in the Queen's speech are the privatisation of electricity and the broadcasting bill. But it now seems that the latter may still be presented this autumn.

Not all the bills can be completed during this session. Water privatisation is not expected to be carried into effect until 1989 or 1990. But the way will be cleared for it by a short enabling bill. On rates reform the government will seek parliamentary approval of the major change it wants, but the time-scale for the introduction of the new community charge has been steadily lengthening as the opposition to it on the Tory benches has grown. On education, however, the government is hoping to have the new legislation in force by next September.

The major areas where the government is proposing new legislation are education, housing, rates, local authority contracts, licensing hours, criminal justice, immigration control, employment, water privatisation, and trade unions. Several of these bills are large and complicated pieces of legislation covering many different issues.

The education bill will include provisions to replace the University Grants Committee with the new University Funding Council and to make the polytechnics formally independent of local authorities, as well as reforming the schools.

If there is a common thread which runs through all this unwonted legislative activity it is a determination by the government to strip powers from local government. The bill to abolish domestic rates will also establish a uniform business rate which will raise central government control of local finance to around 75%. One of the intentions of the community tax is to encourage local electorates to vote out councils that impose a high charge to maintain their spending.

Local authorities will also be forced by law to put many more of their services out to tender. They will be prevented from placing political conditions on contracts. The housing bill will remove controls from the private rented sector but will also provide for groups of tenants to opt out of local authority control by forming housing associations or making contracts with private landlords.

The education bill is the most far reaching of all. Four major reforms are proposed for the schools. A national core curriculum will be imposed, head teachers will be given control of budgets, parental choice will be increased, and schools will be allowed, under circumstances still to be defined, to opt out of local authority control.

If all these measures are enacted by parliament, and are successfully implemented, the role of local government will be greatly diminished. The government claims that their purpose is to enlarge consumer choice and the operation of market forces, but it is more plausible to see these measures as part of the power struggle which the Thatcher government has consistently waged against the institutional supports of social democracy.

The further restrictions on trade unions that are proposed and the plans to deregulate broadcasting fit into this pattern. The government's primary concern and long-term aim is to deny control of any significant sector of society to political forces hostile to it, either by assuming control itself or by handing it to private sector interests. The seriousness of its purpose and the strength of its determination should not be underestimated. ●

Andrew Gamble

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The Che Guevara Legacy

On October 8, 1967, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was captured and killed in Bolivia. The 20th anniversary of his death will be widely commemorated but at the time his name was not well-known in western Europe. During the French 'events' of 1968, however, he became something of a cult-figure for the radical student movement and his reputation (and physical image) spread more widely thereafter in the general upsurge of student militancy stimulated by these and by the Vietnam war. With the decline of the militant student movement, and of the 'new Left' more generally, Guevara's legend also seemed to fade. By the mid-1970s, he appeared best known simply as the 'Heroic Guerrilla': a figure of importance in the making of the Cuban revolution and an internationalist who died in an endeavour to spread revolution elsewhere.

The restricted vagueness of such an impression stood in notable contrast to the scope and sharpness of the controversies that had surrounded his life and work during the 1960s, particularly, though by no means exclusively, in Latin America and within Cuba itself.

Firstly, Guevara sought to generalise certain lessons of the insurrectionary phase of the Cuban revolution for struggles against dictatorial regimes elsewhere in Latin America. The Cuban experience had demonstrated that a professional army could be defeated by a popular insurgency and he argued, further, that it showed that not 'all the necessary objective and subjective' conditions of revolution needed to be given since 'the insurrectionary *foco* can create them'. Moreover, the Cuban revolution showed that in underdeveloped America, 'the terrain for armed struggle should be basically in the countryside', the guerrilla being 'above all an agrarian reformer'. In subsequent years, these propositions were extended in scope and detail and found their most elaborate expression in Regis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* of 1967.

The debates sparked off by such arguments were passionate and often acrimonious. This was in part because Guevara's assault on what he called the 'passive attitude' of many 'revolutionaries or pseudo-revolutionaries' seemed to embrace the Latin American communist parties adhering to more 'orthodox' tenets of the theory of socialist revolution. The latter included an emphasis upon the 'vanguard role' not of the rural peasantry but of the urban proletariat and, with this, a matching stress upon the importance of the level of capitalist development attained in particular countries. There was also an evident and pervasive conflict of view as to the weight that could be imputed to the force of simple human will in the making of complex social events.

Guevara also triggered a vigorous discussion concerning the principles of socialist construction. Of these, the best known turned on the relative weight to be accorded to 'moral' as opposed to 'material' incentives in planning socialist economic development.

Marx had argued that the creation of a mass communist consciousness, in which labour was loved for its own sake and not for the material reward that it might bring, required material abundance and a transformation in the nature of the labour process to rid it of its primitive or repetitive character. Until socialist development itself could bring about such conditions, then material incentives must prevail in distribution, with the ruling maxim being: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.'

Guevara did not deny the need for *some* material incentives but he argued that within a balance of remunerative mechanisms the greatest possible emphasis should be placed upon 'moral', not 'material', stimuli. If socialism was truly to be distinguished from capitalism in the ordering of economic affairs, then it must tap quite different wellsprings of human conduct. Moreover, just as the will and action of the insurrectionary *foco* could accelerate the development of the 'objective' and 'subjective' requirements of revolution, so could the 'New Man' impose himself to some extent upon the economic process so as to accelerate the development of the productive forces. If the inspirational conditions specified for labour by Marx did not exist – as in Cuba they could not – then others must take their place: love of the revolution and of suffering humanity, for example.

The 1960s saw many endeavours to apply variants of Che's insurrectionary model to diverse countries of Latin America but the tiny wheels of the guerrilla *focos* nowhere seemed able to set in decisive motion the larger wheels of the broader society. The fate of Che's own expedition to Bolivia was a major setback for the advocates of the *foco* theory and, in 1970, Allende's electoral victory in Chile held out an ephemeral hope that radical social change might not always need to be brought about by force of arms. That Latin American illusion was dispelled in blood in 1973 and, in its aftermath, Cuba, for its part, seemed best-equipped to support international revolutionary interests not so much by inspiring guerrilla *focos* in Latin America as by defending fledgling revolutionary African states (ie, Angola, Ethiopia) against external aggression.

In Cuba's domestic economic sphere, meanwhile, it had become evident by the end of the 1960s that there were potent limitations to the effective scope of a centralised planning system stressing 'moral' incentives. The morale of 'vanguard' workers in the economy, like that of 'shock-troops' in warfare, requires careful nurturing. This means not least its efficient deployment in tasks that can be fulfilled. But the failure to produce 10m tons of sugar in the harvest of 1970 was the culmination of a number of years in which voluntary labour was hurled into economic battles that could not be won.

The experience encouraged the development of a less centralised, more participatory and more efficient mode of resource-utilisation in the years that followed and the maxim: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work' was restored to primacy. In the most recent period of 'rectification of errors', however, the relative balance of 'moral' and 'material' elements in the incentives system has been judged to have tipped too far in favour of the 'material', with too great an influence being left to 'economic mechanisms' and not enough for politico-administrative decisions.

This is doubtless reinforced by the need to encourage a climate of austerity and self-sacrifice so as to confront acute economic difficulties, associated in part with a protracted depression in world hard-currency sugar prices, with related problems in the repayment of hard-currency debt. Such an environment is propitious for a revival of interest in some of the basic ideas on socialist construction as they were advanced by Che Guevara more than 20 years ago. ●

Brian Pollitt

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Che: Historical cult figure

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Power To The Parents?

It is easy enough to see the recent events at Dewsbury as worrying signs of things to come. A group of enraged parents who claim their motives are cultural and not racial are taking exactly the sort of action which, under the forthcoming education bill, will allow them and others like them to challenge the local authority and insist on the school of their choice for their children. Administratively this would turn the work of the authorities into a nightmare.

As it is, local authorities currently expect thousands of parents to make do with a less popular school than the one they originally marked down as a preference. The appeals system can be long and unwieldy and the problem is often solved by the child settling down happily in another school.

What is different about Dewsbury is that the parents have organised themselves as a body, and have insisted on their rights to places in Overthorpe Junior, a largely white school, in preference to the school to which most of them have been allocated, Headfield Middle School, where Asian pupils make up 85% of the intake.

Inevitably this adds a further and much more unpalatable dimension to the affair. The parents have angrily denounced those in the press who have typecast them as racists. Other Asian parents (there are some Asian parents within their own numbers), they claim, are equally keen to set up their own Muslim schools which, when the bill is passed, will be technically possible, as long as they can fulfil the educational requirements laid down by the education secretary Kenneth Baker. And so the Dewsbury group is merely doing now what soon will be quite legitimate: insisting on the school of their choice.

Administrators, academics and others (none of whom is speaking as a parent) say this will lead to a system of educational apartheid. Where children have the right to be educated in an environment which is committed to a particular set of cultural or religious values, multiculturalism will be made a mockery of. It will lose most, if not all, of its meaning, and right-wing educationalists, exploiting an unpleasant aspect of the populist parental lobby – namely racism – will have won another resounding and possibly irreversible victory.

How accurate is this account, and what other factors lurk under the surface? Clearly, the action poses an administrative nightmare for Kirklees council, and raises the spectre of similar problems for other local authorities in the future. Baker has sought cover by arguing that at present he has no power to act, and that the authority has not in any way behaved improperly. This is a wise move on his part; despite being at the forefront of parent power, Baker cannot come out strongly when race lurks in the shadows as a possibly explosive issue. This would make him more vulnerable to a much wider range of critics, and could well undo what he and his colleagues see themselves as having achieved.

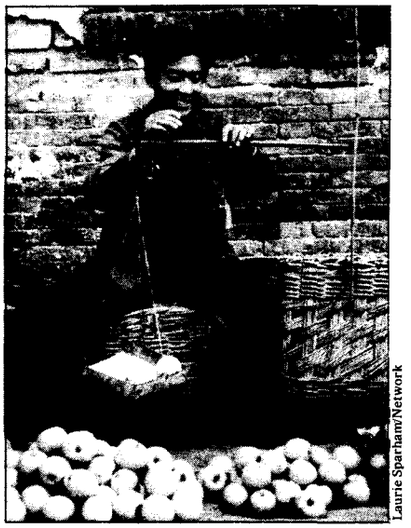
Leaving aside Baker and his proposed legislation and the clear racist undertones of the Dewsbury affair, Dewsbury parents have raised some issues which must not be ignored. They have taken the fate of their children into their own hands, and acted in a way which has a wider populist echo. They have, at a politically sensitive moment, brought to the surface the whole messy business of parental preference, in opposition to the smooth running of the forces of educational administration. They want places in Overthorpe, they say, because they like the head teacher's traditional style, his strictness, and his emphasis on standard academic achievement. It is *these* demands which make the Dewsbury parents so representative of parents, black and white. It is this which the tabloid press, in particular the *Daily Mail*, has transformed into a populist crusade for the Tories.

Administrators will argue that *all* their schools are of a similar quality – in this case, they argue, Headfield is excellent. This poses the experts (who rightly say that white children are not disadvantaged by being educated alongside black children, indeed more often they do better) against the non-experts – the parents. However, there is no doubt that schools *do* vary enormously, even though they are not supposed to. All parents know through the grapevine the reputation of the schools in their area. It is this which often figures in their calculations rather than attempts by the authorities to persuade them that all schools gain the same results.

In a sense, it is a no-win situation. Nothing could be higher in parents' minds than the need for a dramatic overhaul of the education system. Until this happens, parents who are not in a position to move into a good catchment area or opt out altogether are going to join forces locally. The Left has no alternative but to recognise this fact, and the very real, if sometimes misguided, desperation which prompts action like that taking place in Dewsbury.

As yet there has been little sign of a shift within the Left on the question of parental involvement in schools. Labour spokesperson Jack Straw instead has come out in favour of other Tory-inspired reforms, claiming, for instance, he himself had drawn up plans for a national curriculum as far back as 1973. ILEA's leader Neil Fletcher has rightly asked for more time for discussion on Baker's plans but, other than that, the precise role of parents, the values that they are likely to argue for and the terms on which they will want to be involved still seem to be something that the Left, including those working in the education system, prefer not to think about. ●

Angela McRobbie



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Changing Chinese economy

The Long March To Reform

The process of reform in China since it began in late 1978 has been characterised by periodic cycles of slowdown and acceleration. This is most evident in industrial or urban reforms where the implementation of each successive package of reform measures has tended to generate overheating, overinvestment, inflationary pressures, and budgetary and trade deficits. These negative side-effects then compel a period of economic consolidation during which the reform process is slowed down and, in some cases, reversed.

Reforms in China since 1986 have been on the down cycle, following economic overheating in 1985. The question now, however, is whether the present hiatus will be followed, as in the past, by the reintroduction of reforms with a vengeance. The simple extrapolation of past trends can no longer suffice as a guide.

One reason for this is that reforms have reached a critical stage where choices about further and necessary measures are increasingly ideologically sensitive and technically complex. When the Chinese reforms were first introduced, the lead-

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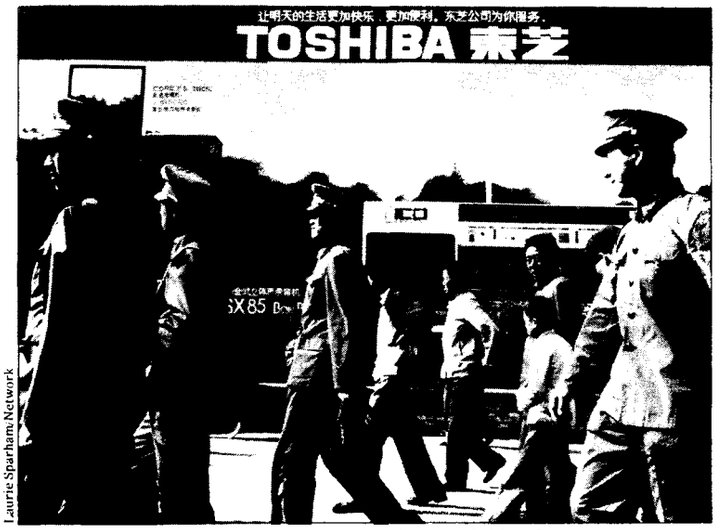

Laurie Sparham/Network

China's open door: Ushering in bourgeois ideas?

ership sought to defend the reforms' marxist legitimacy by enforcing, conveniently if somewhat superficially, a separation between the concept of management from that of ownership. Thus, reforms were presented as a change in the system of economic management while public ownership of the means of production remained inviolate. Industrial reforms introduced within this framework, however, failed to produce the hoped-for gains in productivity.

Quite aside from the failure to reform the irrational price system because of political anxiety about its inflationary impact, the reforms in enterprise autonomy suffered from the inability of the government to introduce fundamental changes in microeconomic behaviour conducive to independent profit and loss accounting. 'Investment hunger' and 'soft-budget constraints' continued to pervade the Chinese industrial system because enterprises remained unpenalised for erroneous investment and production decisions, with the state, the ultimate owner, meeting losses through subsidies.

It is now recognised by the overwhelming majority of Chinese economists, and by the more reform-minded members of the leadership, that further reforms must confront the question of ownership if enterprises are to become autonomous accounting entities. To introduce such changes while preserving intact the socialist nature of the Chinese state, it has been suggested that the *form* of public ownership be changed from the present state ownership to more diverse forms such as joint-stock companies in which the state and other enterprises as well as individuals can own shares. Concomitant with such a change would be further marketisation of the Chinese economic system, involving among other things the development of capital, labour and housing markets.

Understandably, these changes are objected to by the more dogmatic and orthodox members of the leadership. These so-called conservatives are also reformers in a fashion: they prefer a leninist NEP-type system in which limited market relations are allowed on the periphery of a system dominated by state-owned enterprises subject to a mixture of direct and indirect planning. But both radical reformers and 'conservative' reformers alike recognise, the former positively and the latter negatively, that changes in the form of public ownership and full-fledged marketisation represent a crossing of the Rubicon in marxist theory and practice.

Meanwhile the framework of consensus leadership within which such ideological and policy differences over reform have hitherto been contained is now being undermined by a power struggle as various factions jockey for position in anticipation of the 13th party congress. The 13th congress will elect a new party leadership for the next five years.

In these power struggles for the leadership in succession to Deng Xiaoping, policy differences over the reform programme serve as the principal ammunition for the conservatives. The latter have argued that the market-oriented reforms of premier (and acting secretary-general of the party) Zhao Ziyang are essentially a Pandora's box which, once opened, will usher in bourgeois political ideas corrosive to socialism.

Deng Xiaoping himself articulated the notion of the indivisibility of economic and political reforms last year, and it was his call for suggestions from Chinese intellectuals that led to proposals for checks and balances to the monopoly of power by the Communist Party, and ultimately to the forced resignation of Hu Yaobang as party secretary-general following student demonstrations in favour of Western-style democracy earlier this year. The leadership's definition of political reform is much more narrow: rationalising the party and state administrative structures within a leninist framework.

But the conservatives have overplayed their hand. In seeking to capitalise on the excesses of reformers advocating radical political reforms, they themselves have committed excesses in seeking to undermine Zhao Ziyang's position by attacking the economic reform programme. It is evident that Deng Xiaoping is now seeking to force out the conservatives by stepping down himself from the politburo, thus forcing other veteran leaders to follow his lead as Chinese political and cultural decorum requires. The end result is likely to be a balanced leadership with reformers (Zhao Ziyang, Wan Li and Qiao Shi) holding the key positions but counterbalanced by open-minded, less dogmatic 'conservatives' (Li Peng, Yao Yilin) who are essentially in favour of a more cautious pace and scope of reforms.

The 13th congress will also be a public relations exercise, especially to the outside world. Consequently, the congress will reaffirm China's commitment to reform and its open door policy by introducing further measures in these areas. Political reform (of a sort) is paramount on the agenda, involving a major reorganisation of the party apparatus and possibly the abolition of the politburo as well as the abolition of the post of secretary-general and its replacement with a chairman. This type of change would be consistent with Deng Xiaoping's narrower conception of political reform: bringing in younger technocrats and separating party and state functions.

Economic reforms to be announced at the congress are likely to include a rationalisation of the central economic agencies through merging the state planning and state economic commissions into a single, leaner comprehensive macroeconomic planning organ.

The major reform is likely to be in agriculture, where further marketisation and the abandonment of compulsory state purchases of grain are on the congress's agenda.

The 13th party congress will certainly rekindle the outside world's optimism about the future course of Chinese reforms. That is one of its objectives. In the longer term, the actual course of reforms will continue to be cyclical. Sooner or later decisions about crossing the Rubicon need to be taken, but they can only be taken with a re-examination of marxism, leninism and stalinism. The fragility of the political consensus that is likely to emerge at the 13th congress will suggest that such re-examination is not quite timely yet. ●

Cyril Zhiren Lin

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Taxation Tangles

Don't expect any parliamentary miracles over the poll tax. The legislation due to be introduced into parliament this autumn will pass through the two houses relatively unscathed because it was a centrepiece of the manifesto and its defeat would represent a major constitutional crisis.

The really interesting point is the extent of the political damage that will result from this parliamentary success. Many Labour supporters see the poll tax as their party's best hope of improving on the 1987 election result.

Optimists beware here too. Although the poll tax was indeed enshrined in legislation for Scotland before the general election, the dire Scottish result for the Tories cannot be put down entirely to the Labour Party's successful campaigning against it. Labour had been riding high in the opinion polls there long before the tax was conceived. South of the border, the Labour Party's utter failure to make use of the poll tax, especially in London where the new tax will mean massive increases for many households, bodes ill for any campaigns on the issue.

The decision, made in cabinet just before ministers went off on their holidays, to phase the introduction of the tax starting in 1990 will help to hide the real cost of the tax during the run up to the next general election. The treasury's opposition to the new tax is based on their awareness that, when the time comes, the government will force them to pump extra money into the rate support grant – or whatever replaces it – to further mask the financial effect of the poll tax.

All of this is not to deny that the poll tax is a staggering own goal with little support from within the cabinet – only Ridley and Herself are real aficionados of the idea – and even less within the Tory Party and the electorate.

The worst problem electorally for the Tories is that there will be more people in households that are big losers than big gainers. John Gibson, of the Institute of Local Government Studies, has shown that there will be over 8.3m electors with bill increases of over £100 per year. For every 62 people in these households, there are only 38 who are in households paying £100 less per year. That's because most single adult households will gain, whereas most three-adult households will lose, and obviously there's more people in the latter.

The losses will be compounded by the high cost of collection that will have to be passed on to poll taxpayers and, more important, the revenue lost through evasion. Estimates of this vary from 10% to 20%, with the London boroughs and other urban authorities suffering the worst.

Then there is the muddle over whether those on benefits will have to pay 20% of the poll tax bill or not. The present plan seems to be to make everybody pay at least a fifth of their poll tax bill but to increase benefits by 20% of whatever the government thinks should be the poll tax for the area, if the council were not 'overspending'. However, that will either mean different rates of benefit across the country or penalising people simply for living in an area where demand for local services is high. If the government drops the 20% plan, the ostensible raison d'etre for the poll tax – greater local accountability – goes out of the window because those on benefits will again make no financial contribution.

Of course, the accountability argument is pure political pap. With the new unified business rate to be pooled centrally, rather than kept by the individual authorities, the amount of local government spending covered by a local tax will drop from 51% to 23%. The real reason for the proposed reform is greater central control, particularly over the left-wing controlled councils whose destruction is a major component of Mrs Thatcher's plan to eradicate socialism. ●

Christian Wolmar

Brum Brum

When Nigel Mansell's tyre exploded in the Australian Grand Prix last autumn it was an image that captured the imagination of millions. They are the new audience that follows motor racing as a television sport. Like snooker and bowls, motor racing has found a dramatically enlarged following through the medium of television, and in particular BBC2's *Grand Prix* on Sunday evenings.

You won't find these millions at your average motor race meeting. The British Grand Prix, as one of Britain's premier sporting occasions, attracts over 100,000 people. But after that, a couple of meetings might draw 20-30,000, and then it's 10,000 or more likely much smaller. By and large, only the motor racing enthusiast makes the trek to one of Britain's dozen or so permanent circuits like Silverstone and Brands Hatch.

The Birmingham city council has changed all that. Britain's second city, as it likes to be known but whose national profile has generally belied, set about trying to get a motor race around its city centre many years ago. It made a lot of sense. The West Midlands experience of recession has been more traumatic than most. The city needed a new image and new sources of employment. While, of course, Birmingham, along with Coventry, is the home, economically and culturally, of the motor industry.

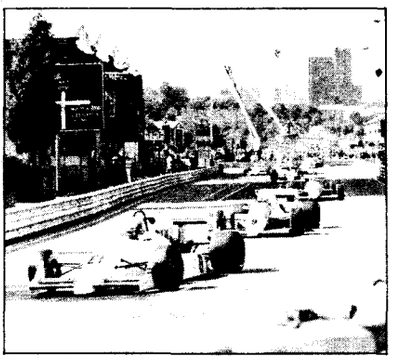
After a long quest, motor racing finally took place for the first time around the streets of Birmingham a year ago. On August bank holiday this year, 100,000 people turned out for the Birmingham Superprix, an enormous crowd given it was not a Formula I race.

This was motor racing with a difference. It brought it to a community rather than vice versa. As councillor John Charlton, the chair of the motor racing committee, puts it: 'The council wanted a spectacular but distinctly Birmingham carnival'.

That's exactly what it was. Jugglers, street theatre, a mardi gras marching band, sword swallowers and rock bands vied all day with the motor racing. It was an occasion for the family, easily Birmingham's biggest turnout for a decade, and highly multi-racial, like Birmingham itself.

But there was another sense in which it didn't seem like an ordinary motor race. Motor racing, like many sports, isn't exactly 'socially aware'. And, for fairly obvious commercial and technical reasons, it's an expensive game. Moreover, big money – from sponsorship to hospitality suites – is more and more calling the tune.

The Birmingham meeting was somehow different. There was the carnival. There was the enormous multi-racial crowd. There were the streets of an inner-city. There were the houses and flats around the circuit bearing home-made stickers, banners and posters, their residents proud to be in the national spotlight. There were the banners at each corner with the name of the corner and the slogan 'slow down on smoking'. There was the impressive litter patrol. There was a PA system, with its discussions about Birmingham's problems, often (though not often enough) in Birmingham accents.



Second city's Superprix

The Birmingham Superprix showed not only that a council can organise a motor race, but that it can do it differently, with a social awareness. The Labour council captured not only the imagination of Birmingham but also that of the motor racing-public. As the Tories prepare their next assault on local government, Birmingham city council at least has found new friends in a seemingly most unlikely quarter. ●

Peter Harvey

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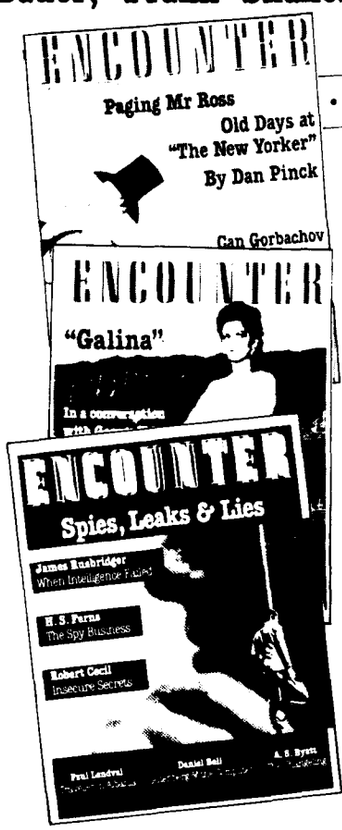

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The Mersey Purges

What is often obscured in the discussion around realignments, rebuilding and rationalising the Labour Party machine is nothing less than the creation of effective local, thriving parties.

Now is the time to return to the people, to service their needs and imaginations.

It is sad, therefore, that in one of the regions where resistance to Thatcherism is manifest, and which could become a model of popular socialist politics with a buoyant working-class base, namely Merseyside, Labour seems determined to purge activists most closely associated with a renaissance – albeit problematic – of labourism.

The purge of Militant in Liverpool always carried the risk of immobilising rather than enabling renewal of the party. The Liverpool city council now seems to be recovering. But unfortunately, other constituencies in the region which are not dominated by Militant are now being harassed and threatened by disciplinary actions and suspensions.

'Nothing in the Labour Party is simple, and its byzantine structures, particularly its relationship to the union block vote, vexes even the most democratic imagination'

In three constituencies, Knowsley North, St Helens South and St Helens North, charges have been brought against leading activists, and the party has been effectively closed down in St Helens.

Disciplinary action was taken against activists in Knowsley, which includes Kirby new town, after activists there lobbied the council when it cut the grant to Kirby's unemployed centre – one of the more broad-based activist centres in the country.

The centre was deemed a threat to the new Right. 'Militant' was murmured. But none of its workers are members of the Militant tendency. The centre has been hit just at the moment that the social base of the centre has been expanding.

Members of the Militant tendency have always met at the centre – but so, too, has the bigger and burgeoning housing co-ops movement, which Militant opposes, and which – apart from *Letter to Brezhnev* – may be just about the only good thing ever to have happened to this crumbling new town.

As it happens, in all three constituencies MPs to the right of their constituency parties have been imposed on the membership, who could be forgiven for suspecting that the purges are really about the protection of what are known locally as an endangered species – members of parliament at risk of de-selection.

The MPs at risk are, or rather were, firstly, George Howarth, the rightwinger imposed on Knowsley North. Constituency activists refused to support him on the grounds that they didn't choose him: 'We want to be full members of the party, not partial members,' said one party official. Then there's Gerry Bermingham, who has survived re-selection threats and a dose of sexual scandal. And finally, close Kinnock adviser John Evans, regarded as efficient, conservative and anti-unilateralist. He risked de-selection in favour of the popular local leftwinger John Duncan.

Duncan is hardly a Militant supporter. He's a well-liked representative of Merseyside Enterprise Board, which has secured an extraordinarily wide spectrum of support – except from Militant.

The board is backed by Alliance councils in the region, trade unions, local bankers, chambers of commerce, local firms – just about everybody, in fact, except Liverpool city council when it was controlled by the Militant tendency.

Clearly the democratic rights of the constituency parties are at stake – but there is something more than that, too, which is the meaning of democratic reform in moribund Labour fortifications.

All these parties have had a volatile history, with more than their share of feuds and vendettas. In the 1980s they were taken over by the Left, which if it was anything tended to be Bennite.

And all of them seem to have displayed the kind of butch hard leftism which may have seemed to many Merseysiders – particularly women – to be just as alienating as the conservative labourism that preceded them.

The aura of Militant surrounds the cases, but the links haven't been proved. So, if it's not about Militant, it's about containing an expanding Left in the Merseyside Labour Party. Typically, the three constituencies have been extending participation in their policy-making committees during the 1980s, in an attempt to revitalise party machines which had become de-politicised and effectively moribund. No doubt this expansion was also a bid to secure the Left's tenure.

The main source of new delegates has been from trade union branches. In St Helens, where the political culture seems to have been confined to its 20-odd drinking partners and the paternalism of Pilkington, the glass-makers, one of the constituency management committees grew from 35 delegates to 200 in the 1980s. The party sought to involve 'the wider labour movement' in its policy-making processes.

Most of those were men, of course.

Things being what they are, the trade union filter would produce a men's party. Little or nothing seems to have been done to engage the women of St Helens in the making of a new politics.

Many trade union branches are as moribund as the Labour Party, and the new, bigger and better policy-makers' claims to being more representative than their predecessors may have been bogus. Nevertheless, 200 has to be better than 35 by any reckoning.

The national party leadership's response, however, has been to protect the endangered parliamentarians, to punish protesters campaigning against politically-motivated cuts, and to close down St Helens district party for two years.

St Helens must also now restrict access to management committees from 200 to 35. In other words, the national party seems to be closing down access to the party's machine in order to control it.

In the midst of all this bureaucratic filibustering, who appear as the democrats? Clearly, the Left, however limited its composition and however fragile its constituency, has begun to open up the party. If the Left's base is narrow, the Right's is even narrower.

But the Right, represented by John Evans, has now seized the political initiative by promoting a new democratic reform – one member one vote. This exquisitely simple formulation reflects well on the Right, of course. However, nothing in the Labour Party is ever simple, and its byzantine organisational structures, particularly its awkward relationship to the trade union block vote, vexes even the most democratic imagination.

In opposing one member one vote, Evan's party, like most of the party's left factions, failed to follow up the Bennite inner-party reforms pushed through at the beginning of the decade with new initiatives to democratise the party's relationship to the people.

The purges can do nothing to open up the party. In fact, they seem to be designed to do the opposite. But the Left in Merseyside won't be seen to be acting in good faith unless it is seen to be willing to do more than fill Labour Party general management committees with 'the lads', and share their party and their power with their communities. ●

Beatrix Campbell

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LETTERS

New Initiatives

Charlie Leadbeater's approach (*MT*, September) presents an unbalanced view of the problems facing the unions. We have to come to terms with the economy as we find it, but trade unions can never aspire to take total responsibility for efficiency and competitiveness as he implies. This job is the responsibility of the owners who appoint managers to do this work.

Union members in their turn appoint officers to act for their interests, and, at the end of the day, a recognition of the distinct responsibilities of management and unions is essential to a healthy democracy.

However, large areas are available for compromise and agreement. Bargains to help efficiency and productivity are struck with monotonous regularity – often prompted by the initiative of the unions.

The problem many modern commentators have in discussing unions is that they fail to grasp the complexity and multiplicity of nuances that emanate from a movement that delivers for members, consistently, every day of the week. An understanding of these complexities cannot be gained from simply talking to a small circle of general secretaries at Congress House.

These shortcomings are often reflected by journalists who write about new initiatives which, in reality, have been practised by many unions over the years.

Unions have always been agents of both conflict and co-operation at the same time. It is a question of balance and approach depending on the circumstances.

What unions have to do is to be clear about their purpose, which can never be simply to accept the status quo. They could always be agents for industrial and social change which will benefit their members as well as the wider society in which they operate. We also have to find new methods to do our business and win the approval of the wider community. In this respect I agree with Leadbeater; a strategy with policies to cover working time, ownership and control, training and industrial modernisation is essential.

I agree with the importance of public service unions taking an increasing interest in the quality of public services. Teachers, nurses, social workers and public servants will increasingly have to be concerned as much about the quality of service as their own direct pay and conditions. But the balance can never be struck simply in one direction. It will always be a case of finding arrangements that are appropriate for the circumstances in which we find ourselves. ●

Tom Sawyer, London

Hegemonic Project

We are strong on why the Left was unable to intervene hegemonically in a bid to create a new historic bloc in the aftermath of the collapse of the social democratic postwar consensus, but weak on what to do now. There are two unresolved questions. The first is the basis on which an alternative historic bloc to Thatcherism could be created.

The second question is what agency can insert an alternative hegemonic project, not itself socialist but informed by socialist values and gramscian-marxist strategy, into the mainstream of British politics.

Labour Party chauvinism, and its endemic anti-theoretical paternalism, precludes it from acting as the agent for the construction of a new historic bloc informed by self-determining democratic values. The Labour Party will, however, together with the trade unions, other autonomous movements of the people,and other reforming political parties (like a merged Alliance, the Greens and possibly, but by no means certainly, the Communist Party) be part of the forces constituting such a new historic bloc.

The question of agency remains undecided. What is the point of ritual reference to the role of class, unless at least some suggestion as to how it can be made operational is also offered? I don't think anyone has the answer to this question, which is why Stuart Hall's brilliant analyses always end on a pessimistic note.

We won't find the answer without fundamental rethinking on the Left based on a wider empowering of prospering, disenfranchised and alienated groups. ●

Pat Devine, Manchester

Khomeini Regime

Roger Owen (*MT*, September) is incorrect in attributing revolutionary respectability to the present regime in Iran.

This regime has replaced a corrupt ineffectual monarchy which was imposing alien values on Iranian society. The regime rests upon a real need on the part of Iranian people to develop in their own way – a universal need. But to equate the Khomeini regime with the positive revolutionary endeavour upon which it feeds is false.

The great ideological divide in the world is a dispute as to what is meant by 'truth'. Is truth wholly objective? Or is truth sought by all people who care about it, valuing each other's efforts and trying to learn from each other's subjective findings?

People who hold the first view are a menace to human progress. The Moral Majority, the Infallible Ones and the Holy Warriors are all in this category. Their language often gives them away; they are always on about the 'evil empire', the 'enemy within', the 'heretics' and the 'great satan'. Such people have given a false prospectus to a genuine Iranian revolution. The hysterical, eagerly suicidal, popular support for Khomeini has as little genuinely revolutionary content as the Nuremberg Rallies of my youth.

Heirs to the English, American, French and Russian revolutions must unite against rabble-rousers posing as revolutionaries. The fashion is for such posing to take the form of some kind of 'fundamentalism'. The problem is how to defeat your opponent without descending to his level. Very few political leaders seem even to be aware of this problem. ●

Eric Stockton, Orkney

Reconciliation

Further to your letter from the co-chairman of the Namibia Support Committee (*MT*, September) ISHR does not have 'extreme right affiliations', but merely seeks to pursue human rights in a non-violent fashion which aims at reconciliation rather than revolution. This is not right wing but rather in the British liberal tradition; furthermore, we do not support apartheid, or racism but work energetically for the end of both these evils.

In South Africa we wish to see the evolution of a multi-racial, multi-party and pro-Western democratic and legally-based regime. We make our opinions on this matter openly and freely known. If the Namibia Support Committee wishes to see something other than this then it is up to them to make clear what this is and how they intend to achieve it.

Advertisements for our report on South Africa were placed in the *New Statesman*, *The World Today* and *Encounter* magazine as well as *Marxism Today* in order to reach as wide a part of the policial spectrum as possible. This intent reflects the true nature of the membership, support and attitude of the International Society for Human Rights and the work we do. ●

Robert Chambers, London

Spurious Politics

Criticisms made in your letters pages are not being taken on board. *Marxism Today* seems happy to appeal not just to holders of high incomes but also to holders of quite spurious politics. July's issue carried an ad for a pro-apartheid organisation; August's carried an ad for an anti-Sandinista book on Nicaragua from the Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies. These are apparently interchangeable with those placed by the ANC and NSC.

Sure, the potential revenue from radical advertisers is limited – but do you really need to broaden your appeal to take in a right wing imperialist/sexist readership? There are plenty of non-radical but also non-reactionary advertisters to be found. If the magazine's political coverage appeals not just to the white straight Left, but also to the black constituency, lesbian and gay constituency, Scottish and Welsh readers (interesting that from your August guide to the Edinburgh Festival, it is only possible to get to Edinburgh from London) then a new source of advertising would be opened up immediately. If you are seriously interested in broadening your readership, then begin listening to the constructive criticism of those readers who aren't white, straight, male and well-off. ●

Mary Browning, Mel Steel, Gavin Bultitude, London

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LETTERS

MacBride Principles

John Freeman (*MT*, September), asserts that the crucial distinction in the Belfast labour market is not religious but geographical. Catholics living in west Belfast are only marginally worse off than Protestants living in this part of the city. This is incorrect. The latest detailed figures on unemployment from the 1981 census indicate that in the notoriously deprived Protestant areas of west Belfast, the Shankill ward, the male unemployment rate was 27.6%. This is well below the figure observed in many Catholic parts of the city. The inequality between Catholics and Protestants is not simply a matter of geography as John Freeman claims. No matter where they live in Northern Ireland, Catholics have an unemployment rate two to three times as great as Protestants living in the same area. Catholics clearly suffer from extreme disadvantages in Northern Ireland and special measures are required to redress this imbalance. It is not sufficient simply to campaign for more jobs for Northen Ireland as a whole, or for particular geographical areas. While this might be of some help to Catholics, it would not redress the extreme imbalance from which they now suffer. What is required is a vigorous programme of affirmative action and contract compliance to ensure that Catholics get their fair share of the new jobs. This is just what the MacBride principles are supposed to achieve. Their aim is to ensure that American investment in Northern Ireland is used in a non-discriminatory way. To portray this as an attempt to get Protestants sacked from existing jobs is quite wrong.

Prior to 1984, when the MacBride principles were formulated, strong affirmative action or contract compliance were not on the agenda of either the British government or the Northern Ireland trade union movement, and efforts to put them there were defeated. With the build-up of the campaign around the MacBride principles in the US, these bodies have been forced to change their position and to take the question of Catholic disadvantage more seriously.

What progress there has been to reduce discrimination in Northern Ireland during the past 20 years has largely been the result of external pressure. The Fair Employment Agency, in which John Freeman lays so much store, itself represents external pressure. Moreover, this agency has often been reluctant to act or ineffectual unless backed up by pressure from the outside. For example, over a period of years Short's aircraft company virtually ignored FEA requests to change its extremely biased recruitment patterns. It was eventually forced to modify this stance only by the fear of losing valuable US government orders. If the case of Short's had been allowed to 'develop within the politics of the trade union movement', as John Freeman wants, nothing would have changed. ●

Bob Rowthorn, Cambridge

Progressive Pedagogy

In his review of my book, *Why don't teachers teach like they used to?* Keith Ebbutt points out that: 'It does not make any allowance for the background, education training and outlook of many primary teachers'. Such an analysis was not part of my brief.

My aims in writing the book were to counter the misleading but persuasive media propaganda arguments against progressive education and state a case in opposition to the woolly pseudo-progressivism sometimes found on the extreme Left.

Keith stated that current teacher training was producing teachers who believe in innate intelligence. In my work over the past two years I have come into contact with many young teachers and have not noticed such a trend.

Brian Simon's article makes the case for a concerted campaign to defend the maintained system. This is a matter of urgency and we should all be flooding the DES with protest letters alongside other forms of activity. The recent report on comprehensive schools in Scotland ought to have the very widest publicity because the facts in it expose Baker's claim that the new bill is designed to improve education. This is a bare-faced lie: the new bill is meant to lower government spending on education for the majority and involve those parents who can pay in paying for all or part of their children's education. ●

Ray Pinder, London

Popular Fronts

The debate about the Liberal/SDP Alliance is crucial to centre-Left politics.

Even if you consider him a possible British De Gaulle or an Oswald Mosley style demagogue, Owen represents more than himself or the views of the anti-merger SDP group. To allow the Owenites to split from the centre Left will mean their absorption by the Tories leading to a crushing Thatcher fourth term with a near 50% vote.

British politics is full of examples of centre-Left splits being 'consumed' by the Tories in electoral pacts, parliamentary alliances and token cabinet seats. In 1885, Joseph Chamberlain prevented the Liberals from having a majority government for 21 years; in 1916-18, Lloyd George split the Liberals and they never again held power; and in 1931, Ramsay MacDonald abandoned the 1930s to Tory despair.

The Communist Party, and thinkers like Laski and Cripps, have talked loudly about 'popular fronts', but it has been the Tories who have quietly put them into action, subsuming centre-Left forces. Instead of letting this happen again, cannot we reverse this trend? ●

Gerry Hassan, Dundee

Radical Alternatives

Brian Simon's article (*MT*, September) outlined and analysed the government's educational proposals in a perceptive, penetrating, thorough manner and should persuade all those concerned about education that these policies are detrimental to the educational opportunites of all those who depend upon their local comprehensive for schooling. No other conclusion is possible, but this does not mean we can assume there will be a concerted oppositional campaign, which, if broad and united, can deflect, alter, or halt the measures presently being shoved through the democratic process. Even if teachers, parents, educationalists, local authority politicians and officials can set aside sectional interests and campaigns and forge a working relationship in a realisation that this is *the* most important issue facing all those who believe education should be a liberating force that opens doors, and extends opportunities, this still begs the question: What do we want our education system to look like?

It is not enough to defend 'the comprehensive principle', something much more radical is required. The Tories are, once again, addressing very real concerns and anxieties. Comprehensives have raised standards but young people and parents are not completely satisfied with most schooling that is on offer. To only defend the status quo is not to listen.

The issues of parental choice and participation, raising standards, teacher accountability and the content of the curriculum need grappling with. They are vital and we must talk about them and come up with a viable alternative to Kenneth Baker's 'solutions' otherwise we deserve that which will be foisted upon us. ●

Nick Hudson, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

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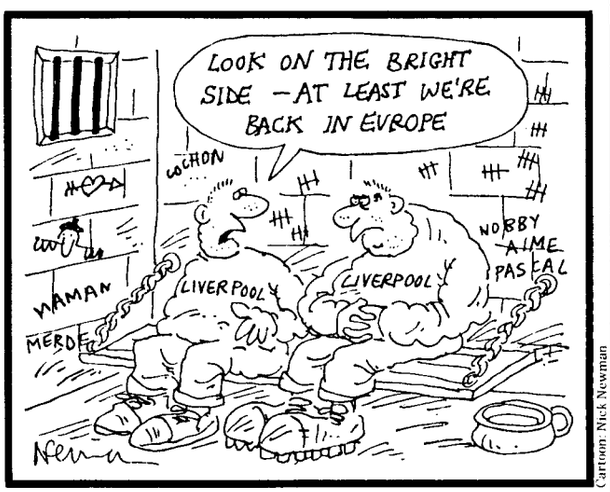

Cartoon: Nick Newman

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Out Of The Wilderness

The general election was another serious defeat for Labour. And this time the campaign was fought with great flair. In short, we've run out of excuses. **Eric Hobsbawm** reckons we must now rethink our policies and our political constituencies

As Mrs Thatcher enters her third period of government, the situation of the British Left is particularly troubling. The defeat of 1983 was plainly self-inflicted by the Labour Party, and made quite inevitable by the split in the opposition. That split naturally remains a fatal obstacle, and the case for backing single candidates against the Tories at the next general election, against which there were no rational arguments in 1987, is just as unanswerable now. Just as it was possible to say with certainty in 1983 that a divided opposition would keep the Tories in power into the 1990s[1], so it is equally certain that in the absence of unity at the next election, the Tories will stay in power almost to the end of the 20th century. There will have to be as many single opposition candidates as possible opposing each Tory. The time to start thinking about how to ensure this, is now.

However, in 1987 Labour had abandoned the suicidal follies of 1980-83, and the technically excellent campaign was fought under superior and united leadership. So much so that it actually scared the Tories and Mrs Thatcher. Our defeat therefore suggests that the reasons for Labour's failure are more deep-seated.

Not that the results of the election were entirely negative. It had four positive results. First, there was the rout of the Tories in Wales and Scotland. Second, and confirming the insistence of the Left (and not least of *Marxism Today*) on the importance of the women's movement, there was the substantial turn of women away from the Tories – especially of young women, who surged towards Labour with an 11% swing (compared to 1.5% for the men aged 20-24). Having the first British woman prime minister patently did not help the Tories.

Third, and equally striking, was the dramatic Tory loss among the middle classes. Only a little more than a third of electors with a university education voted for them in 1987, compared with 44% in 1983, the rest dividing 29% Labour and 36% Alliance. The middle class today is not a homogeneous political block, but profoundly divided, roughly between the more and the less educated, those involved with the public side of society and those in private business. And fourth, there was the dramatic failure of the Alliance, which entails the prospective disappearance of the Social Democratic Party, at least as a serious factor in politics.

This will have two welcome results. It will eliminate fantasy projections of third-party majorities or other dream-like political scenarios, and it will establish Labour once again as the major force of opposition, and the party which will head any post-Thatcherite government. And the end of the SDP will make the indispensable task of building an anti-Thatcher alliance easier because it will eliminate much of the embittered – and understandable – mutual ill-feeling which stood in the way of collaboration between Labour and anti-Labour seceders from the party. Building bridges will still be hard, but the obstacles will be less.

However, we should resist the natural pleasure most of us felt at the electoral crash of the SDP. A quarter of the electorate supports neither Tories nor Labour. These people are not going to go away, nor will more than a fraction of them pass over or return to Labour in short order. If the Alliance vote had been stronger in 1987 this would have helped *Labour*, because it would have deprived Thatcher of that three-figure majority which now helps to override all the government's possible hesitations.

The election results were so bad because, with or without tactical voting, the Alliance was just too weak to win any of the seats in which its chances were objectively better than Labour's. Without tactical voting, Shirley Williams was just too weak to edge out the Tory in Cambridge. *With* tactical voting, Labour won Oxford East, but (with equivalent tactical support from Labour voters) the Alliance candidate was unable to dislodge the Tory in Oxford West. The defeat of the SDP is a plus, but the minus side of the Alliance failure probably outweighs it.

So much for the positive side. The four negative results of the election are much more serious. First, and by far the most significant, 1987 confirms Labour's loss of majority support among the working class. But for the women's shift to Labour this would be even more striking. Whether or not skilled workers actually moved *away* from Labour in 1983-87, as some data suggests, the fact remains that barely more than one skilled worker in three voted Labour, six out of ten trade unionists refused to support the party the unions had founded, four out of five white-collar workers supported other parties, and less than half the semi-skilled and unskilled voted for the party of the working class. (Conversely, almost half the Tory vote came from workers). Only among the unemployed did Labour score more than 50%, and then only just. Add to this the fact that two-thirds of voters are now home-owners and 50% of these voted Tory – less than a third of workers owning their homes stuck by Labour – and the scene looks bleak.

The second negative result is that, in spite of all the talk about a deepening rift between the two Britains, the position of Labour in its own heartlands is far weaker than the position of the Tories in theirs. The poor Tory showing in Scotland conceals the fact that Labour's own score in that country (42.2%) is the *same* as the Tories' national score in 1983 and 1987. In both countries, for different reasons, a minority of votes has swept the board in terms of seats. The Tories have absolute majorities in three of Britain's 11 regions (omitting Ulster as a special

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case), whereas Labour has an absolute majority in none. In two of the five regions where Labour is ahead, the Tories are hard behind – about 3%. In none of the six regions where the Tories are ahead is Labour less than 12% behind. There is no way in which such figures can be made to look encouraging.

Third, there is Labour's poor showing in London, which contrasts with its spectacular success in other big cities, where – outside Birmingham – the Tories were virtually wiped out. If Labour cannot win London again, it cannot win at all.

Fourth and last there is Mrs Thatcher's impressive success in reinforcing her own party. She has practically stopped the erosion of support which both major parties have been suffering for decades – and which Labour still feels. And she has done so by compensating her losses to the opposition with massive advances everywhere from the Midlands southwards. This means that we can no longer ascribe her victory entirely to the divisions within the opposition. It means that the excuses have run out. In 1983 the folly of the opposition may have thrown away the election, but in 1987 Mrs Thatcher won it almost on her own.

The Thatcher regime now has five more years to complete its reshaping of Britain and make itself irreversible, and there is nothing in Britain to stop it.

The outlook is therefore more dangerous than ever. The Tory objective seems to be, and is probably seen by most of them including Mrs Thatcher as, the utopia of economic neo-liberalism: every man an entrepreneur, the triumph of the unrestricted market and the dismantling of state interference in the economy and the affairs of the private citizen. In short, the anarchism of the lower middle classes. But this objective can only be achieved by an enormous increase of centralised state power, because it implies the destruction of the system of British institutions and policies which was constructed over the past 150 years by Tory, Liberal and Labour governments with a very different model of capitalist society in mind.

What is more, Mrs T's political appeal is the opposite to that of the do-nothing politician her programme dreams of. Like a number of other public figures today – eg, Craxi in Italy or, in a comic-strip Rambo version, Colonel Oliver North – she capitalises on the longing of puzzled and disoriented voters for leaders who take decisions and bypass talking shops and legal niceties. It is a fashion which sends a chill down the spines of those of us old enough to remember the last time politicians made their fortunes by exploiting these longings during the last great world depression.

Furthermore, it is extremely doubtful whether the Thatcherite utopia of a totally sovereign free market is fully achievable under conditions of bourgeois (or any other) democracy, even though the British constitution gives governments far more power than other parliamentary systems, especially with the help of compliant judges. However, Mrs Thatcher's rightwing revolution may need more restriction on traditional British rights and liberties than even tame judges are ready for.

I do not think the Left is fully aware of what is likely to happen in the next five years, and how powerless we shall be to stop it, while opposition MPs (and dissident Tories) score debating points in a rubber-stamp Commons, and hard-left activists call, more ineffectively than before 1987, for action in street and workplace. Already opposition politicians, after a brief exposure to the real world of the election, are once again retreating into the private world of conferences, division-bells and wishfulness. For within that world, business as usual can resume because the actors in the play are their own audience (plus a few political reporters). It is easy to see how absurd, and politically senseless, the post-election dogfights in the SDP are, but we too risk a return to similar bouts of self-destruction. For speeches, references back, gestures and postures have four years of clear run before they really have to be tested again[2]. In the meantime all they seem to cost is air and paper.

So it is urgent to remember what the situation actually is. If Thatcher wants to go ahead with any project today, however unpopular, hopeless or absurd, in the short run there is nothing to stop it. This is as true of the poll tax as it was of the GLC. That is no reason for not fighting the government, and it does not exclude an occasional success in battle of an army which, for the time being, is fighting a rearguard action. But the object of such a fight cannot realistically be to 'stop Thatcher now' (or whatever the *Morning Star* or *Socialist Worker* headline will call it). It must be to prepare policies, supporters and allies to reverse the situation in future.

What is more, there is not much that we can do to stop Thatcherism reinforcing its political strength by eroding Labour's base. It will flog more council houses, and sell public industries and property, not only to make a present to big investors, but to make worker-buyers identify with capitalism. (It doesn't help simply to point out that, as the *number* of share-owners has multiplied, the *percentage* of shares controlled by individuals in Thatcher's Britain has gone down sharply, while that controlled by institutional investors has risen). It will continue to transfer economic activities to regions and activities where Labour is weak and can be weakened. Thatcherism does not mind a Labour Party reduced to representing and speaking for a minority of declining areas and interests, especially those (like coal mining and council housing) which the government itself can cut down further. It will eliminate local government autonomy. It will not mind cries of defiance from Brent, which have not actually proved massive vote-winners even in Brent. In the meantime, arrangements to muzzle or self-muzzle the media will have been even further strengthened, so as to make it difficult to give mass circulation to any reports which might be seen as critical of the government. For this government is hard-nosed enough to aim not at journals like *Marxism Today* or *Tribune* but at *Panorama* and the *Ten O'Clock News*. Probably the first successes in building a united front against Thatcherism may be won in the common fight against this government's attack on press freedom.

'But the object of such a fight cannot realistically be to "Stop Thatcher Now" (or whatever the *Morning Star* or *Socialist Worker* headline will call it)'

So what can and ought Labour to do? We have a double task: to rethink our policy and to rethink the question of the social forces which can create a viable basis for a progressive government. Neither is served by cries of betrayal against those who insist on looking at the world the way it is. This double task, by the way, is not peculiar to Britain. The Left has taken a beating in most of the developed European countries. The specific problem of Britain is that we are, to a greater and more dramatic extent than other developed countries, an economy in decline and perhaps a people in disarray; that we have, perhaps for this reason, fallen prey to a particularly dangerous bunch of right wing ideologues, who happen to have laid their hands on what is a political system of theoretically unlimited central power, which lacks any effective counterweights and controls such as those provided elsewhere by written constitutions, supreme courts, various kinds of federalism and – in some richer countries – alternative resources not under the direct control of the central power. One should not forget that Britain is, in theory, an absolutism for governments with unshakeable majorities. In the past the guarantee of British freedom, including both civil and personal liberties and those of local communities and authorities, rested essentially on politically-calculated self-restraint. We no longer have a government that accepts such self-restraint.

The potential majority for a future progressive government, it is now clear, will rest on a social coalition. All the major classes and strata are today politically divided, so that a simple class appeal will not mobilise more than a part of any of them. This applies to the Tories as much as to Labour, for more than 40% of *their* class core – the ABs (professional and managerial strata) refused to vote for Thatcher. So far as Labour is concerned it means that even as a party seeking to win back the working class, or as much of it as can be recovered, *Labour has to appeal to a*

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variety of interests and attitudes, ie, to think in terms very similar to those of building an alliance or coalition. Politically, the workers in the ruins of Merseyside do not respond to the same appeals that strike home among the workers in Harlow and Basildon (which have more industry today than Sheffield). In practice 'class politics' can no longer be realistically counterposed to 'people's politics'. In any case an appeal which mobilises a minority of a class at the cost of pushing a majority elsewhere cannot realistically claim to be class politics.

Granted that our appeal should be to all the 'workers by hand or brain', it does not follow that it must be one-sided, ie, an appeal to the right. Certainly the workers have to be recaptured. But if it is absurd to claim that they have been lost by watering down the pure milk of socialism, and politically senseless to concentrate on the support of some groups at the cost of alienating other and larger ones, then it is just as wrong to suppose that Labour's problems can be solved simply by moving the party to the right. If Labour, or for that matter any broad anti-Thatcher alliance, wants to win some day, they need to keep the support of the Left as well as the Right. Losing Merseyside could be as fatal as losing Basildon was.

It is equally mistaken to suppose that Labour must automatically shift its appeal to the right to win the growing white collar and middle strata, now that the industrial workers are too small a class to provide a majority single-handed. Obviously the left-of-centre and progressive middle classes are not going to queue up to vote for what they understand to be Tony Benn's or Arthur Scargill's line, and even less for the sort of Labour activists who can be labelled 'loony Left', but then, neither will a lot of workers. On the other hand it just is not the case that readers of *The Guardian* or *The Observer* as a social type are put off voting for a socialist Labour Party, or even that (as some on the Left feared) Alliance voters would be more reluctant to vote tactically for Labour candidates than the other way round. The key to broadening Labour's appeal outside the working classes is not avoiding the transformation of society but making it more credible as well as attractive.

But social alliances must be more than electioneering combinations trying to attract voters with programmes cobbled together for this purpose; even though elections do have to be won. Thatcherism won and kept power by offering not immediate benefits, but a break with the past, the end of a long period of national decline, and radical action which claimed to secure a modernised Britain. That is still the main Thatcherite appeal, for in terms of self-interest the material pay-offs for most of those who are or feel better-off (except for the really rich) are modest – probably they do no more than continue the trend-line of the past 30 years. On the other hand the social costs of Thatcherism are felt to be shocking – that was the basis of Labour's campaign success – and the setbacks on the road from 1979 to 1987 have been severe and dramatic.

Some Election Quotes

'You never know. I might be here in the year 2000, or I might be twanging a harp.' (Margaret Thatcher, June 11, 1987)

'Throw Out Thatcher! Vote Labour! No Confidence In Labour Leadership! Build A Revolutionary Socialist Alternative!' (*Workers Press*, May 30, 1987)

'If Neil Kinnock, John Smith, David Steel and Paddy Ashdown were to sit down together with some bottles of good wine for a long summer afternoon in the hills of Tuscany, there is much they would agree on.' Peter Kellner, *New Statesman*, June 19, 1987)

'It is not an alliance with the Liberals that Labour needs, but the working-class vote . . . If it concentrates on getting that it will not need to flounce around seeking new political allies.' (Eric Heffer, *The Guardian*, June 23, 1987)

'So long as there is divided opposition, it will be a case of divide and rule.' (David Steel, *The Independent*, June 13, 1987)

'We have a double task: to rethink our policy and to rethink the social forces which can create a viable basis for a progressive government'

The reason why we have not made headway against Thatcherism is that Thatcherism is still the only programme on offer with the object of changing the British economy. In the absence of any other party with a vision of a renewed Britain and the determination to get there, even the absurdities of free-marketing look better than nothing, and the ruin of industries, the millions out of work, the bonanzas for the rich at the expense of the helpless, can be sold as the necessary short-term costs of the transformation which will eventually succeed. Labour cares, but – as the election showed – caring doesn't seem to be enough.

What Labour, or rather a Labour-led alliance of forces, must offer from the left is the equivalent of what Thatcher offers from the right – and, incidentally, in spite of all the hype, has not even begun to look like achieving; for there is a difference between a prosperous consumer society in parts of England and the modernisation of the British economy. Labour will return to office only as a party which offers such a New Deal: modernisation – and in a human and responsible manner. Whatever the long-term prospects for Britain, what the country needs *now* for any kind of future is such a transformation.

There are three guiding principles for such a policy.

The first is the hardest to accept: the recognition that the British economy of the 1970s, including the parts dearest to the Labour movement, needed a kick in the pants. We must therefore distinguish between those economic changes since 1979 which ought to be reversed, if possible, such as the privatisation of what even in free market economics are 'natural monopolies', and those which should not. Would most of us seriously wish to return to the situation which kept modern technology out of British newspapers (and stopped the appearance of new ones), even as we grit our teeth at the thought that it was ended by the likes of Shah, Murdoch and Thatcher? I think not.

However, the issue here is not so much whether there can or ought to be a blanket reversal of everything done since 1979, but a more profound one. Major change in the economy changes things. Too often, in the labour movement, it meant anything and everything except change in existing arrangements, especially the ones from which we benefited. If Labour wants to modernise Britain it will have to be as ready to disrupt old habits and practices as Gorbachev is in his effort to modernise the Soviet economy. And, in our own way, as ruthless as Thatcher in hers.

The second is that modernisation can be socially responsible. There are plenty of examples of the socially irresponsible, such as Brazil, where it has produced probably the highest degree of social and economic inequality in the world. (I do not include Thatcherism, for while it is spectacularly unfair and inegalitarian, it is *not* an effective recipe for modernisation). There are a number of European countries which prove that another way is possible, and which neo-liberal propaganda has therefore preferred to forget. They are the countries of the corporatist tradition in its successful, ie, social-democratic (=labourist) form: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Austria. They are among the economic success stories because they have kept unemployment low – far lower than elsewhere in western Europe – and their welfare states in good order while navigating the storms of the years of global economic troubles, and adapting themselves to the inevitable structural changes in industry, the economy and society.

They are not necessarily models for Britain – for one thing they have much smaller populations – but we can learn two things from them: that Thatcherism was not the only answer to the

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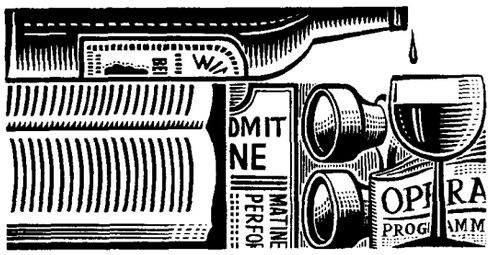

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1970s and that labourism can be – but on one condition. These are regimes with, by and large, a wage-policy co-ordinated between governments and unions. They do not have union movements which, as in Britain, still largely reject any interference in the individual union's right to ask for as much as it could get, never mind the economy as a whole. This policy, effectively a form of free-marketism which produced inegalitarianism and made any kind of national economic planning impossible, socialist or otherwise, is still often supported by an unthinking Left.

The third principle is that modernisation requires a combination of public control and planning with markets. Using markets and private enterprise will not only be inevitable for any post-Thatcherite government, given the privatised economy in which it will have to begin operating. As the trend of reform in the socialist world also shows, socialist planning itself now feels the need of a market element, and this is not incompatible with planning. Actually, the main socialist discovery of the postwar era has been precisely that the social management of the economy can take other forms than total centralised planning under total public ownership. The socialist problem lies in finding the right combination to get economic and technical dynamism while maintaining equality and social justice.

There should be no need to argue this point any longer. On the other hand what needs to be said over and over again, is that turning round a declining, obsolescent economy *cannot be done by following the free market*, and certainly not under British conditions. Nor has Thatcherism failed to halt the relative decline of Britain, in spite of the unnecessary mass murder of so much of British industry (the word 'holocaust' in this connection is not mine[3]). Britain has not regained the comparative competitiveness – such as it was – which our industries had in 1978. We are still sinking. Italy has passed Britain in the league table of the major economies, or is on the verge of doing so. The reason is simple. Making money is the object of free enterprise, and in a declining country there are demonstrably better, and above all faster, ways of making a lot of money than in the long-term and expensive business of restoring the fortunes of Britain.

That is why practically all the major efforts at industrialising poor and backward countries, or transforming lagging and sluggish economies, have, in our century, been motivated by non-market ideologies, either socialism or economic nationalism, or a combination of both. Greed is not enough. Unlike Thatcherite neo-liberals, even serious non-socialist modernisers refuse to follow the free market where it conflicts with the interests of the country. This means that they have sought to transform their economies by means of deliberate and conscious state policy, state control and planning, with or without a large public sector.

Leaving aside socialist regimes, a number of countries have set themselves this target since the second world war, and several have been strikingly successful. None of them have been Thatcherite: Japan, France after 1945, Finland, Brazil, and South Korea, to name some dramatic cases. Capitalist – yes. But it is bizarre to see Thatcherite economists claiming as triumphs of the 'free market', for example, the 'five year plans' of Korea since 1962, which have achieved probably the fastest industrialisation in history, with their strict credit and exchange controls, their targeted 'development sectors' and export objectives, and a direction of the economy more centralised even than in Japan.

There is absolutely no reason to believe that a serious reconstruction of the British economy, and especially of our industries, will be possible without such development targeting, by government, without control, planning, incentives and penalties. However, there are three additional reasons why the free market will not do for Britain.

First, there is the need to undo the damage of the right wing Luddites, ie, the destruction of the existing machinery for managing and regulating the economy, including regulating the market itself. Intelligent businessmen themselves admit that more regulation (including control of the irresponsible monopolies created – as marxists could have told us – by deregulation and privatisation) is necessary.

The second is the need to rebuild the country's infrastructure, which has not only been allowed to crumble but also contains much Victorian investment in, for example, public and private buildings, drainage and water-supply systems that is now reaching the end of its useful life. New York City (note: *not* the free market) is spending $15 billion in the 1980s on its transport system, and it is estimated that just restoring and rebuilding the bridges of the USA would cost $50 billion. Apart from providing jobs, a systematic programme of this kind would be an essential investment for the country's future economy.

The third, and in some ways most vital, is the need for education. I know of no poor or backward country that has ever fully transformed itself into an advanced one without an educated labour force at all levels, and this is surely as true of turning round declining economies in the era of late 20th century hi-tech, as it was of Scandinavia. 'No amount of productivity' says an American banker, 'will survive competition with the Korean, Malaysian and Taiwanese standard of living. To create jobs and businesses that add high values to raw materials through skill and technology, we need an educated workforce. We are not creating one.'[4]

If this is true of the USA, which does not stint its spending on education, it is even more true of Britain, which provides vocational and technical education for only 6% of its secondary pupils (the usual European figure is between 25% and 30%); which sends a lower percentage of the relevant age-group to higher education than any other country in Western Europe, bar Portugal and Greece; and which has the almost unique record of letting the proportion of its GNP spent on education in the last 10 years drop by something like 20%[5]. Private enterprise has never done it, and will not do it now.

'The main socialist discovery of the postwar era has been that the social management of the economy can take other forms than total centralised planning under total public ownership'

Here is the basis for a programme which can unite and increase the non-Thatcherite majority of the British peoples, for it opens a way to the necessary reconstruction of Britain. It is also the way forward for socialists, even though it does not guarantee a socialist future. For our main theoretical task is to demonstrate to people who see no reason to believe it, why public interest is better than private profit. It just will not do any more to issue statements to the faithful about 'developing a socialist economic policy, including the extension of common ownership into the financial and manufacturing sectors', for the non-faithful, will inevitably ask: 'What's in that policy?' and: 'Why more common ownership?'[6] Talking to the converted is unnecessary. It is the 70% of others we should be bothered about. We have to show them *concretely* how and why public action, planning and policy, including common ownership, is better: not only for the victims of society but for Britain as a whole; not only to share the national cake out fairly, but to make a bigger cake to distribute; not only in the abstract, but in the existing, hard, international competitive system. This is the way we can show them. What is more, someone has to show them, for in the circumstances of Britain, neo-liberalism, whether Thatcherite or dressed up as a 'social market economy', is not a way for reversing the secular decline of our country. ●

[1] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Labour's Lost Millions' *Marxism Today*, Oct 1983.

[2] Example: 'The alternative is driving towards a Labour victory through pushing back the Alliance and then winning over those potential Labour voters who, in the last elections, voted for Thatcher' (George Galloway, Ken Livingstone, Ann Pettifor, in *The Guardian* August 24, 1987). Sounds good, until you remember that in Greater London almost 70% voted non-Labour in 1987.

[3] See Robin Marris, 'Does Britain Really Have a Wages Problem?' (*Lloyds Bank Review*, April 1987, p 42) The author of this interesting critique of Thatcherite 'achievement' is a guaranteed non-socialist.

[4] Felix Rohatyn, 'On the Brink' (*New York Review of Books*, June 11 1987, pp 3-4).

[5] As can be worked out from UNESCO *Statistical Yearbook*, 1986, Tables 3.2, 3.7, 4.1.

[6] 'Labour, the Liberals and the unity of the Labour Left' (*Tribune* 21/28 August 1987, p 5). The quotation is the *only* reference to the economy in this document.

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The Morals Dilemma

The Tories have made much political capital out of the 'moral crisis'. And there *is* a problem: remember Heysel, think of Michael Ryan. **David Edgar** argues the Left must have something to say about personal behaviour

From child abuse to 'race commissars', from street crime to video violence, the silly season was dominated by tales of individual iniquity and talk of its political redress. And while August may be, as the saying goes, a uniquely wicked month, it is clear that causes and cures of anti-social behaviour will continue to influence policy debate.

This is of course a territory in which the personal has always been political. Moral attitudes have always informed social policy, as Bernard Shaw trenchantly noted in *Pygmalion*, when he has Arthur Doolittle point out the essential distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Four years ago, when the then still crusading *Sunday Times* exposed the full misery of single-parenthood in Hackney, correspondents were quick to point out that the mother in question didn't *have* to have her baby, that wrecked cars and old mattresses are dumped by *somebody*, and graffiti doesn't scrawl itself.

Moral judgements of personal behaviour are thus – and have always been – a crucial component of the *political* debate over social policy. It is not a debate that the Left has been doing that well in recently. True, the election campaign demonstrated that Labour still led the other parties in the arena of provision of the universal caring and welfare services – the health service, school education, the retirement pension. But as soon as care becomes selective and discretionary, as soon as its notional recipient gains a face and a history, the public's capacity for social compassion became significantly limited. Even the plight of the unemployed appeared to excite less universal concern than hitherto.

The reason for this is simple. Throughout the second term, the Conservatives devoted much energy to the ancient sport of victim-blaming, developing and honing a variety of interlocking ideological mechanisms which relocated the causes of unemployment, poverty and even racism within the behaviour of the victimised groups themselves, increasingly defined in terms of personal morality. One obvious example is the way in which the single-parent family has been transferred from the deserving to the undeserving column of the social ledger.

Another was the not always unspoken assumption that the social pathologies popularly associated with the inner city underclass – from domestic violence and drug abuse to soccer hooligans and vandals – demonstrated not only economic but ethical weakness: as Conservative ideologue Ferdinand Mount put it, the Right's use of the word 'demoralised' usefully elides loss of morale with lack of morality (*Spectator*, July 11 1987), thus allowing the moral *responsibility* for the condition of the wretched to flip effortlessly from us to them. Allied with this was the idea that those

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sections of the underclass who might notice that they had bootstraps to pull themselves up by, were being encouraged by left-liberal teachers, social workers and others to the view that society owed them a living, and if it refused to honour the debt, they were entitled to appropriate it.

This individualising of guilt not only allowed the Conservatives to evade blame for the evils of unemployment; it also let their own people off the hook. A key element of the hysterical assault on anti-racism that marked the concluding months of Thatcherism Mark Two was the idea that racism was not a structural fault but a moral failing, and that for a local or national government to pursue a collective strategy against it was as absurd a notion as a collective campaign against sin; that an anti-racism campaign or even a Race Relations bureaucracy was as ludicrous a concept as a conscious strategy of Anti-Slothism, an Envy Monitoring Unit or Gluttony Awareness Training.

Race is a particularly dramatic example of an issue where the arenas of social policy, politics and personal morality overlap: soft (if not downright subversive) teachers are seen to be miseducating young blacks into exaggerated expectations and the idea that if denied them, they have the right (on the grounds of 'centuries of oppression') to take what they cannot earn, if not by crime then by riot. The idea that the Left gives the poor permission to commit crime (a notion most fully developed by conservative sociologists and criminologists in America) is one of the most potent components of the Conservative moral package.

All of the above I believe to be dangerously true. And yet I don't think I was alone in sensing, during the election, that the Conservative claim to inherent superiority in even the personal moral arenas was beginning to crumble. Wasn't there a growing suspicion (lurking in the darker corners of the opinion polls) that the Tory moral line was contradictory and indeed hypocritical; that its rejection of any environmental explanation for deviant behaviour was just a bit damn convenient; and that too often it appeared to promote one moral law for the rich (and/or respectable) and quite another for the poor?

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence for the contradictions of Conservative moralism has been provided by the indecisiveness of its chief ideologues on the question of child sexual abuse. On the surface, what could be a juicier issue for Tory moralists than mass outbreaks of child-molesting in high unemployment areas (even better, in the very heart of the wingeing North); what more suitable a St George than Dr Marietta Higgs, as she takes on the dragons of paedophilia on behalf of the vulnerable and the innocent? But of course the difference between the Cleveland case and (say) the notorious cases of unchecked (if non-sexual) abuse of children in Brent and elsewhere, is that the abuser is not a boyfriend but a husband, and the colluder not a single parent but a wife. So instead of bleeding-heart social workers failing to protect the innocent against the immoral, we are faced with meddling doctors, boldly going where they've no business to, attempting to tear apart what the marriage service quite clearly states no man (or even less, a woman) should put asunder.

'Wrecked cars and old mattresses are dumped by *somebody*, and graffiti doesn't scrawl itself'

If the Tory moral critique of the underclass – on which its evasion of responsibility for unemployment rests – is indeed contradictory and hypocritical, then the Left has a huge opportunity to seize the initiative, to set the agenda for the development of codes of personal behaviour appropriate to the post-religious (not to mention the post-industrial) age. What might prevent it taking full advantage of that opportunity is its own considerable confusion and consequent vulnerability on questions concerned with personal morality, a confusion obvious enough in the ideology of the 'old Left' but equally present in sectors of the new.

The traditional left position on personal morality is of course well known, and much caricatured. It is most often articulated in those endless quotations from V I Lenin (who in this respect, though of course few others, has much to answer for) to the effect that there is no morality above the interests of the proletarian revolution, a principle which arises itself not out of any moral nihilism but the belief that human behaviour is entirely a function of its environment, that the superstructure is a mere glove puppet, manipulated by the iron fingers of the implacable base. In this respect, for the Left to develop a doctrine of personal morality *under capitalism* is as pointless a project as the development of a subaquine lawnmower or the proverbial chocolate teapot: once socialism arrives, the programme of the human machine will be rewritten, and its behaviourial outlook accordingly changed, changed utterly.

It is this delusion which has left such a vacuum in the actual moral arena of socialism in practice, and allowed the familiar forms of normative and collective controls on deviance to have their sway in the socialist countries (and indeed in not a few Western communist parties), with their firm, lower-middle-class philistinism, their unremitting, humourless positivism, and the tendency of all forms of collective activity to aspire to the condition of a scout camp. By contrast, the leaders of the new Left were from the start aware that the New, unalienated Person would not necessarily emerge unaided from the chrysalis of the revolution, and that the creation of that person had to be considered, and even practised for, in the here-and-now.

As a consequence, new Left documents like the American SDS's 1962 *Port Huron Statement* are fiercely moralistic (perhaps the most famous passage of the document begins: 'We regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom and love . . .'), and their tone extended into the late 60s, where the notion of socialist prefigurement, the collective and the commune as a laboratory for the development of new forms of social and personal relationship, as a rehearsal for the revolution, excited the young masses flooding into the European and American protest movements as much as they irritated the communists and trotskyists. And this notion became of course even more enticing when it became clear that one of the routes towards self-cultivation and creativity was the following of personal instinct into hitherto forbidden areas of sensual and sexual behaviour ('if it feels good, do it').

It was the uninhibited assertion of this principle that led many in the new Left to suspect that the virtues of doing one's own thing had its limits, and the new social movements threw up new analyses of the causes of anti-social behaviour, and indeed new, often biological determinisms (based on gender and race), which were in many cases as metallically constructed and crudely applied as the class determinisms on which they were in a real sense modelled.

Both old and new Left, therefore, have difficulties with the idea that the Left should address issues of personal behaviour, certainly in the here-and-now. For the libertarians, it's an authoritarian interference in its project of personal and social emancipation; for the class, race and gender determinists, such an undertaking is pointless (for the social symptoms of capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy cannot be cured in advance of the disease).

I am increasingly convinced that the Left *must* develop a politics of personal behaviour that goes beyond crude determinism or easy libertarianism, not least (but also not only) because if it does not do so it leaves the field wide open for the Right to impose its own analysis and its own solutions. But in doing so, it is equally important to reassert that there *are* material factors in deviant behaviour which remain, if not a sufficient, then at least a necessary part of any credible analysis of its causes.

For of course it is no more than common sense that the poor are tempted to crime more often (and more understandably) than the rich; that material deprivation is a more obviously effective seed-bed for moral squalor than material abundance; that the denial of human function and identity implied and imposed by unemployment is more liable to lead to inertia,

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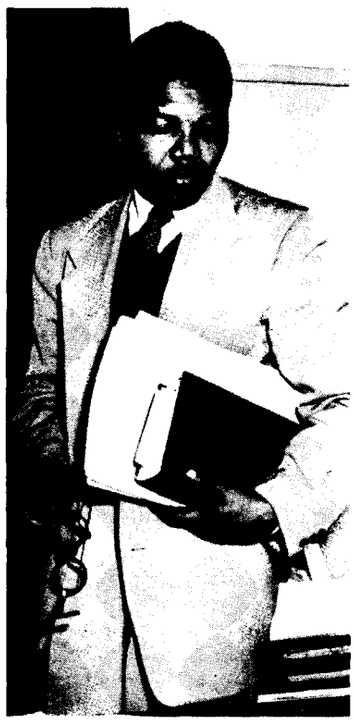

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Nelson Mandela

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APARTHEID Won't Buy It

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'The leaders of the new Left were from the start aware that the New, unalienated Person would not necessarily emerge unaided from the chrysalis of the revolution'

frustration and anger than to a sensitive and mature use of increased leisure time (as Bea Campbell pointed out in *Wigan Pier Revisited*, the poor can't afford *The Pauper's Cookbook*; nor are they actually that likely to get access to the perquisites of an improving hobby) and that – to take on that favoured right canard – although of course poverty is indeed *relative*, and though it is absolutely true that the most miserable of our citizens is markedly better off than the vast majority of Ethiopians (and also, in some respects, than 18th century royalty), a moment's thought about one's *own* attitudes to one's *own* material conditions compared to those around one makes it abundantly clear that someone suffering from relative deprivation is nonetheless really deprived.

So why, with such pressing arguments for the environmental interpretation of anti-social behaviour, does the Left need to go any further? It is not only because such factors do not fully explain why some people do and others don't react violently or criminally to the miseries of their lives. Nor is it entirely because, in terms of practical political policy, the redress of the environmental root causes is (to put it mildly) the long-term solution to a problem experienced bitterly and urgently, by people who should but often don't support the Left, in the here and now.

No, if the Left is to confront the issues of personal deviant behaviour in the present tense, and if it doesn't (as it shouldn't) propose to have any truck with populist, punitive solutions, then it will have (first) to admit that individual anti-social behaviour is a real problem, and that vandalism, hooliganism, drug addiction, domestic violence and sexual abuse are phenomena that should and must be addressed by any political tendency seriously aspiring to power. Second, it will have to confront and challenge the model which the Tories have so self-confidently promoted, of a *cultural* breakdown, rooted in the 60s and embracing factors as diffuse as modern architecture, progressive education, liberation theology and rock and roll.

Happily, on this question, the Tories are by no means invulnerable. True, they can still trumpet the claim that 'sour media mores' have, as it were, given 'social permission' for anti-social behaviour; and in the same way that the Left should not flirt with the law and order lobby, it should not collude with the censor.

But there are at least three elements of the culture of our time which can be seen to contribute to such behaviour and which can and should be directly laid at the Thatcher door. The first – as began to be hinted at during the election – is a positive glorification of individual greed and self-aggrandisement which is seen at its most dramatic in the currency exchanges of the City of London, but which has had a palpable knock-on effect in almost all areas of economic exchange; a legitimisation of selfishness and carelessness for the interests and needs of others which has seeped over from the market place into almost all areas of public and indeed private and family life.

The Story Of Moral Panics 1979-1987

1979: *Gay News* trial: a case of 'blasphemous libel' is brought over poetic representation of Christ as sexual being.
1981: Yorkshire Ripper trial. First Aids-related death recorded.
1982: 'Operation Countryman', an investigation into alleged police corruption launched. Proposal to restore death penalty. Police raid on an Oxford social security office and round-up of 'dole scroungers'. Mrs Whitehouse brings private prosecution against the play *The Romans In Britain*. Terrence Higgins Trust founded.
1983: Cecil Parkinson resigns over his affair with Sara Keays. Hanging Bill.
1984: Jasmine Beckford and Tyra Henry child abuse cases. Campaign against 'video nasties' culminates in Video Recordings Act.
1984-5: Height of 'gay plague' stories in the press. Heroin becomes a media preoccupation.
1985: Heysel football stadium riot in which 38 people are crushed by rioting Liverpool fans. 500 'hippies' arrested when they attempt to hold a pop festival at Stonehenge. Enoch Powell introduces Unborn Child Protection Bill. Resignation of Ray Honeyford over his criticism of multicultural education. Stalker, Manchester deputy chief constable, suspended from duty. Victoria Gillick appeals to House of Lords to overturn ruling on prescription of contraceptive pills to under-16s.
1986: Boy George arrested for possession of heroin. Olivia Channon (daughter of trade and industry minister) found dead after Oxford 'drugs and drink' party. First government advertising on Aids. Clare Short introduces bill to ban nudes in newspapers. Education Act makes provision for parents to withdraw children from sex education. Winston Churchill introduces bill to tighten up law on obscenity and widen it to include tv. Maureen McGoldrick suspended by Brent Council while a charge of racism is investigated. Lords give second reading to private members' bill banning councils from promoting homosexuality in state schools. Childline launched. James Anderton accuses gays of 'swirling around in a human cesspit of their own making.
1987: Jeffrey Archer story breaks. TV Aids campaign launched. Cleveland child sex-abuse scandal. Michael Ryan shoots 15 people in Hungerford. Howarth introduces Obscene Publications Bill to include tv.

Second, there has been from the Falklands onwards a frightening upsurge of a kind of atavistic, tribal chauvinism, which has not only turned multiracial estates into nightmare zones (a phenomenon the Left has consistently – and rightly – attributed in large part to a climate created by this government), but also blighted the football terraces, afflicted public transport and ruined countless holidays and recreational resorts, here and overseas.

The Left should not be coy about making such connections. You do not have to think that *Rambo* should be banned to regard it (and indeed works of the *Death Wish* school) as an outgrowth of a culture of militarism, tribalism and individual aggression that has been deliberately promoted by the very government that is now trying to blame it all on us. Nor should we ignore the fact that both the rampant individualism and the aggressive chauvinism of Thatcherite culture is a function of the reassertion of masculinity and the anti-feminist backlash. Much of the familial and sexual violence we see in the inner cities and on the estates (and it ought to, but perhaps shouldn't, go without saying, behind the privet hedge and beyond the raked driveway) is a function of this pressing crisis of masculinity, the importance of which has tended to be underestimated in the search for less threatening explanations of phenomena like child sexual abuse. As Julie Birchill recently argued, if it is indeed true that most abusers were themselves abused, then you would expect two-thirds of the former to be women (the proportions of the latter), whereas in fact, of course, 90% are men (*New Society*, July 24 1987). As she put it: 'Men are at bay; they are getting nastier and nastier as women get stronger, and they have not finished yet'; an assertion that Michael Ryan, with his privately-made, privately-hired videos, and his privately-bought and legally sold armoury, was about to prove.

A realistic, mountable campaign against sexism and racism, a consistent effort to demonstrate the connection between economic greed and personal selfishness, militant nationalism and racial abuse, triumphalist masculinity and male violence, could and should be presented by Labour as a major component of its social and its *law and order* programmes. The answer to such a campaign no doubt would be the re-playing of an argument consistently wheeled out by Norman Tebbit, Rhodes

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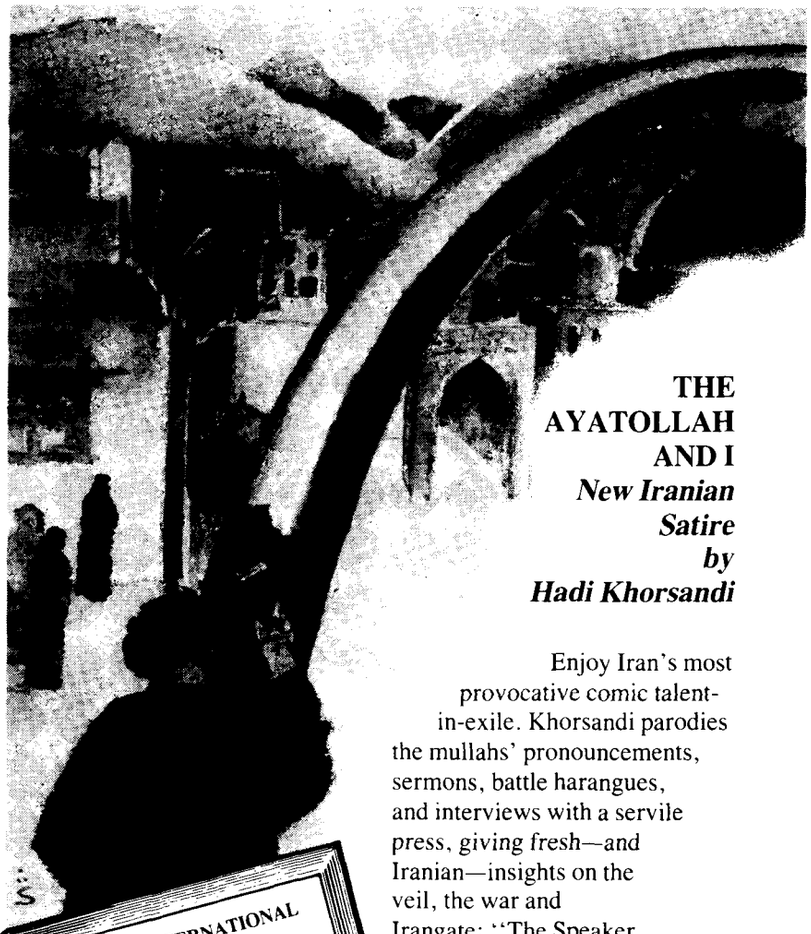

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Boyson and the like (and which featured prominently in the Tory's final election broadcast). It is that the only ultimate non-punitive sanction against anti-social behaviour is provided by shared and accepted values (usually religious) passed on to each new generation by institutions which command universal respect (notably the family).

And although it is vital that the Left asserts the still dramatic and pressing material causes of social deviance, and the connection between such deviance and a *Zeitgeist* which this government has eagerly promoted, its most important task is to challenge the argument that the only conceivable moral code for the late 20th century is a religious one, and the only feasible medium for its transmission is familial. Indeed, it must remind a large number of people (including much of the present leadership of the Labour Party) that active Christian belief is a minority conviction, and membership of a traditional nuclear family a minority location. And having done so, it must go on to look at the way in which its own institutions might develop acceptable and feasible codes of personal behaviour, and means to transmit those codes through society.

The idea that the institutions of British democratic socialism might contain within themselves the potential to reform social behaviour has its critics. One of the most credible is Jeremy Seabrook, who has argued passionately and consistently that the working-class family formed and forms the only realistic bastion against the assaults of capitalism, but that this bastion has been neutralised by the promotion of consumerism, which effectively destroyed the bonds of affection, commitment and solidarity which kept working-class families and their communities together; and, most importantly of all, that those new groupings that have sought to substitute themselves for the family have proved – by virture of their very ersatz nature – entirely inadequate to perform the traditional familial functions of protection, confirmation and care.

Thus, in *Working Class Childhood*, Seabrook analyses his own community – an informal but conscious grouping of those who, like him, 'escaped' from working-class backgrounds in provincial cities and came to the big one in search of enlightenment and liberation. For Seabrook, however, the attempt by this 'elective kinship' to 'reconstitute the roles' of actual kinship, the group's 'fumbling after structures', its 'need for institutions and permanence', was doomed to failure. As he put it, the group *does* manage to rally round if one is, say, terminally ill – but every member knows that: 'We can in all conscience withdraw, so that the surviving members of the blood-family or the statutory services can take over. We have the best of both worlds; although, somehow, it doesn't seem to amount to very much'.

The argument is a powerful one, but perhaps it is unnecessarily pessimistic. For whether or not the old, traditional ties, bonds and roles were as consistently warm and sustaining as Seabrook describes them, it is clear that in many cases they were and are going to continue to be unbearably restrictive and limiting as well, and that durable models of effective 'elective kinship', based around codes of interpersonal and social behaviour appropriate to our times, are going to have to be found.

And there are perhaps at least the prototypes of such models around us. The haunting tragedy of Aids has brought into stark relief what many in the gay constituency knew already (particularly those who lived in gay communities), that a kinship based on a shared nature and a consequent shared oppression can be as mutually sustaining as that of the family, and in many ways more binding and less conditional. For while the Aids crisis has thrown up genuinely heart-warming cases of supermums embracing both fact and person, it is clear that the real, sustained and reliable support for victims and their companions has been provided from within the community itself. The work of the Terrence Higgins Trust, and particularly the buddy system, is evidence of the existence of a genuine moral community which mocks the malice and spite of the false moralists whose response to suffering is to persecute, isolate and criminalise the sufferers.

The considerable achievements of the gay community in confronting the crisis that (at present) afflicts it particularly is perhaps the most dramatic contemporary example of the creation of new moral communities, in response to the changing nature and structure of the contemporary world. It is by no means the only one. Many of the institutions of the labour movement have begun to assimilate (if not before time) the elements of new codes of interpersonal behaviour that grew out of feminism and anti-racism, and have developed institutional forms (of which the appointment of equal opportunity officers in trade unions is only one obvious example) to promote these values. And such initiatives have of course been the very lifeblood of the newer institutions of the progressive movement which have been such a feature of the last 20 years.

It is true of course that many a commune, co-operative and collective has fallen by the wayside – often because of hack-handed attempts by those of a scout-masterly mentality to impose systems of normative control if not actual coercion inappropriate to small-scale, voluntary associations. But many have survived too, and been refashioned in forms (particularly in the housing field) appropriate to the contemporary inner-city landscape, providing imaginative alternative models for the collective implementation of social objectives at the personal level.

'In the most enlightened circles, the spectres of censorship, priggishness and just plain bullying lurk beneath the surface of the rhetoric'

And finally, of course, there is the way in which the two great political movements of the 60s and 70s – indeed in a real way political *inventions* of the 60s and 70s – challenged the personal behaviour of individuals. I have already made the point that no socialist code of personal behaviour could avoid drawing much of its general and specific content from feminism. It should also be remembered that feminism's challenge to coercive and violent personal behaviour has been most acute in what one could call enemy territory: it is in the home itself that feminism has fought hardest and it could be argued had its most intense if not its most extensive purchase on the personal behaviour of women and men.

But also important is the way in which the various branches of the ecological movement, collectively and individually, have influenced and informed our treatment of both our external and internal environment. Individualistic and even narcissistic may the health movement have been; but it would be ahistorical to deny its roots in the political movement against pollution and for social ecology, and blinkered to ignore its potential as a political paradigm. It is perhaps not entirely a coincidence that a major manifestation of a recent upsurge in collective moral consciousness – Live Aid and outgrowths – should take the form of a worldwide act of environmental self-help, a global physical jerk. Certainly the *moral content* of the health movement – its assertion of social responsibility for the personal as well as the global environment – contains further clues for the content and form of a new social code.

Socialism is at base about challenging and eliminating unequal power relations on behalf of the powerless. It is completely appropriate that it should extend that project from the macrocosm to the microcosm, from the unequal relations of classes to the unequal relations of individuals. No-one can deny the problems associated with any consistent attempt by the Left to challenge the abuses of personal power.

The ghosts of the 30s haunt the concept, and (in certain town halls and elsewhere) poison the practice. In the most enlightened circles, the spectres of censorship, priggishness and just plain bullying lurk beneath the surface of the rhetoric. There is much to guard against, much to be ever mindful of. But if the Left is seriously to address society's present and indeed its own recent past, then personal behaviour cannot remain off political limits. After all, the connection between the two was *our* slogan, *our* insight, *our* perception. The Right has tried to take it over. It's time it got took back. ●

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Women's Fertility Rights

The recent deaths of Britain's first septuplets brought the debate about infertility to public attention. But, **Michelle Stanworth** argues, the focus has been on babies, foetuses and embryos, at the expense of the mother

On August 15, some months after being treated with a 'fertility drug' to overcome the effects of ovarian disease, Susan Halton gave birth to Britain's first septuplets. Within 16 days, all seven of these tiny babies, three months premature and unable to breathe unaided or to digest their food, had died, leaving for Susan and her husband Neil a profound legacy of grief.

Susan Halton is one of over 1m people in Britain today suffering from infertility. The tragic experience of the Halton family raises to public visibility the possibility that conceptive technologies – those designed to bypass or overcome infertility – may be damaging even to the people they are intended to help, and gives a dramatic focus to debates about reproductive technologies.

The medical reaction in the press to Susan and Neil Halton's case has involved two elements. First, a determination to prevent a recurrence, since the birth of seven premature babies in one day places intolerable financial and organisational burdens on neonatal intensive care facilities which are already over-stretched. Second, attempts to reassure – by, for example, Patrick Steptoe, of Bourn Hall clinic, and Roger Neuberg, of Leicester's fertility clinic – that the birth of septuplets was indeed a one-off event. With proper monitoring procedures, they say, treatments likely to give rise to pregnancies involving three or more eggs can be detected and the pregnancy prevented. Winifred Francis, who treated Susan Halton, claims that she followed the proper procedures. But the call for 'tighter controls' – for more self-policing within the medical community – diverts attention onto 'human error', and implies that the technique itself, which is used on some 10,000 patients in Britain a year, can be trusted.

The evidence about medical care in the area of infertility gives little grounds for confidence that self-policing by the medical community will ensure a humane and effective service for infertile women and men, or that the promotion of hi-tech medicine is the panacea it is sometimes cracked up to be. In fact, the conceptive technologies are immensely varied: they range from in vitro fertilisation, which involves very sophisticated medical, surgical and laboratory procedures, to surrogacy or artificial insemination by donor, both of which can be and are practised in ways that require no medical intervention at all. Most research in the area of infertility is now devoted to the refinement of in vitro fertilisation and to the development of new clinical applications rather than to alternative approaches to infertility. Meanwhile, the infertility services in Britain are disorganised and under-funded; waiting lists for diagnosis and treatment are daunting; many people are forced to seek treatment in the private sector, or, if they cannot afford it, to abandon their hopes without even the benefit of supportive counselling. Preventative services (for example, for the early diagnosis and treatment of pelvic inflammatory disease) are inadequate, and in spite of the fact that the cause of many cases of involuntary childlessness is never ascertained, the DHSS has not in the past three years funded any research into the causes of infertility; and virtually no work is being done to explore the basic causes of infertility. Against this background, the claims of some members of the medical community to be the guardians of the interests of the infertile must be taken with a pinch of salt, to say the least.

In contrast to the emphasis placed upon hi-tech by some members of the medical profession, feminists have been concerned to develop a broader notion of reproductive freedom, a notion which pays attention to the context in which women exercise choice about reproductive care. In their efforts to have a child, the Haltons have gone through 'seven years of frustration, pain and anguish'. In spite of her sorrow, Susan has declared herself willing to undergo treatment again in six months' time. One of the ways that feminists will read the tragedy of Susan Halton is to see it as a vivid testimony to the power of the institution of motherhood – to the oppressive conditioning which makes it hard for women to envisage a worthwhile life without children, and to the social conditions which deny women other sources of creativity and meaning.

The institution of motherhood is indeed powerful. Reproductive freedom is an illusion where some women dare not say: 'I do not want a child' for fear of being thought mad or bad; and where the absence of alternatives prevents a substantial proportion of women from finding fulfilment and a sense of identity outside being a mother, the choice of motherhood cannot be a free choice. Yet I'm uncomfortable to be raising this discussion in the context of infertility. If these issues are important, they apply to those with children as well as those without, to intentional mothers and non-intentional, to the fertile as well as to the infertile. The patronising implication of some of the comments on Susan Halton would seem to be that if you can have children without medical intervention, your choice will be unquestioned and even applauded; while if you have the misfortune to have ovaries that let you down, or sperm that doesn't penetrate an egg, you should cheerfully devote

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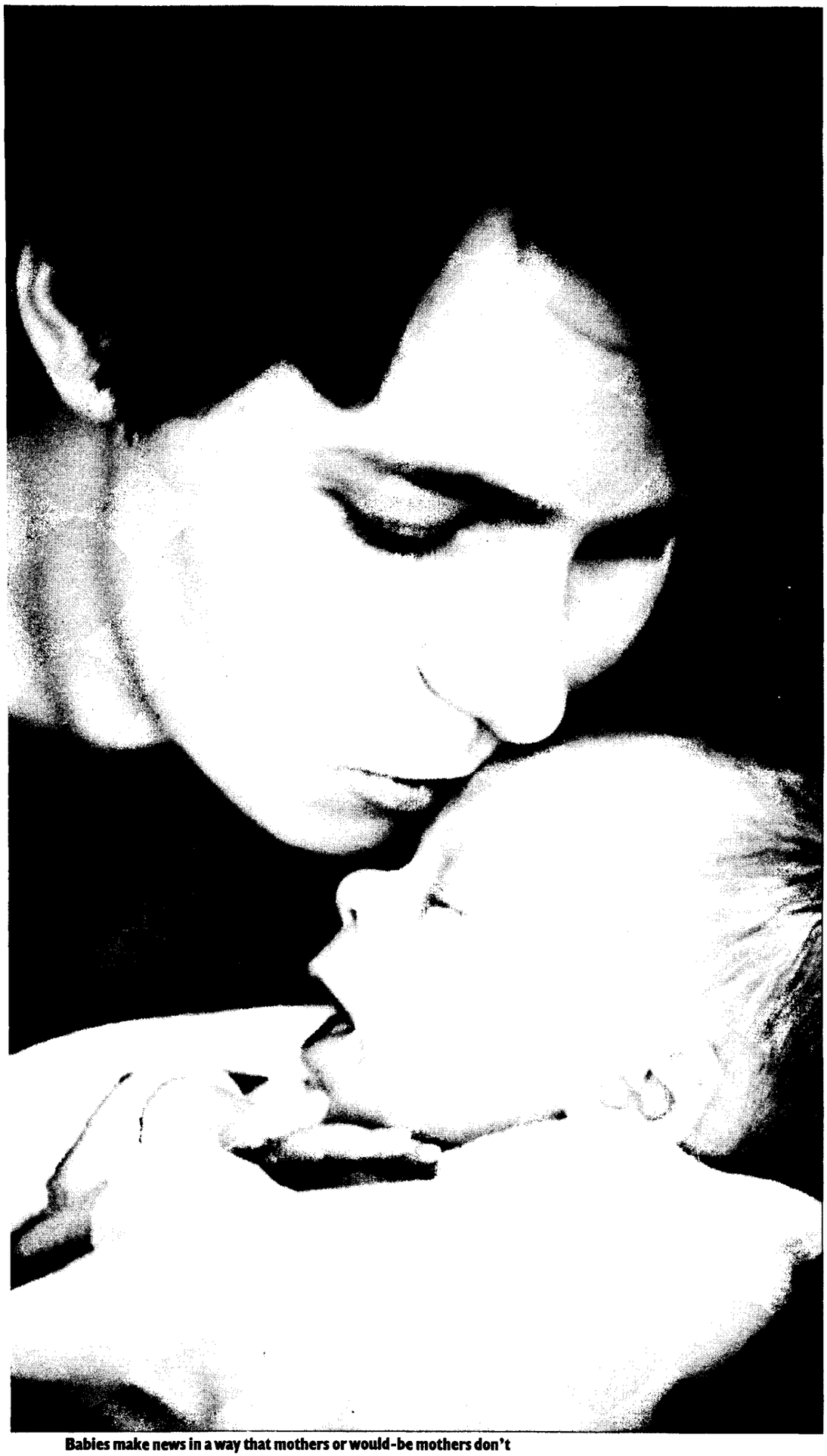

Babies make news in a way that mothers or would-be mothers don't

yourself to a life of political activity or charitable works. The project of creating sources of fulfilment outside of parenthood and the family needs to be mounted, not in order to negate the decision of some of the infertile to keep trying for a child, but to make choice about motherhood – for both fertile and infertile women – more real.

Turning the spotlight on to the motivations of infertile women – requiring them to account for their hopes and dreams, to demonstrate their fitness to be mothers – detracts attention from other crucial issues with which the reproductive technologies intersect. For example, the committees concerned to investigate the social, legal and ethical implications of such technologies, such as the Warnock Commission in Britain – though convinced that infertility is a condition deserving medical remedy – have recommended that the conceptive technologies within their purview be made available only to stable, cohabiting heterosexual couples. But, of course, infertility is not a condition that is confined to heterosexual couples, stable or not. The long-term effect of the conceptive technologies – whether they give people more power to direct their own lives, or serve merely as expensive instruments of population control – depends partly on resisting such restrictions on their use.

The impact of the conceptive technologies also depends on the success or failure of attempts by women to gain greater control over the experience of pregnancy and birth. Pregnancy and childbirth clearly mean different things to different women, depending on whether they are willing mothers or reluctant ones, healthy or ill, supported by friends or partners or alone. But one thing most women would agree upon is that the pregnant woman is the central participant in the process, and that child-bearing is an experience that makes sense in the context of her biography as a whole person.

Not everyone sees it that way. Two prominent social scientists begin a chapter of their book with this startling account of childbirth: 'When a child is born into this world, he seems to enter it in a natural, effortless fashion'[1]. In this description, the 'child' is taken as the focal point. Birth appears as a 'miraculous' process, magical and disembodied, owing more to 'nature' than to the commitment of a living woman. The claim that childbirth is effortless can make sense only from one vantage-point – the vantage-point of a gender for whom childbirth may, indeed, involve no labour and no pain. In this account of birth, the active participation of the mother – her efforts to sustain and nurture the pregnancy, her labour in the delivery room, her intimate connection with the foetus she has brought to the point of independent life – is totally eclipsed.

The eclipsing of the pregnant

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woman's part in child-bearing is also a striking feature of discussions of the new conceptive technologies. Indeed, the very terms that frame these discussions often efface the activities of the woman who is their intended beneficiary. Consider the curious term 'test-tube babies' – first used for the offspring of artificial insemination, but now reserved almost entirely for embryos fertilised in the laboratory. The phrase 'test-tube baby' conjures up an odd image of a foetus growing independently of the body of a woman (a miracle, perhaps, but this time of science rather than of nature). The test-tube baby is not, of course, grown in a test-tube. It requires for the foreseeable future the womb and the willing participation of a woman, to nurture and sustain the early embryonic potential for life.

Or consider the practice known as 'artificial insemination' – the placing of seminal fluid near a woman's cervix by a doctor. The only thing artificial about it, as the philosopher Janet Farrell Smith has noted[2], is that the man who provides the ejaculate does not inseminate the woman by having intercourse with her. But a natural process of conception still occurs, if it occurs, within the woman's body; the mother still nurtures the foetus through her body and gives birth to it in the usual way. Characterising this practice as 'artificial' encourages an unwarranted emphasis in the reproductive process on the act of sexual intercourse alone.

Finally, why have we accepted so readily the term 'surrogate mother'? A woman who goes through a pregnancy, and gives birth to an infant, can only be a 'surrogate' if pregnancy itself does not qualify as an act of mothering. In all these instances, from test-tube babies to artificial insemination to surrogate motherhood, it is the involvement of a pregnant and birthing woman which makes the process of reproduction possible. And it is precisely the significance of her pregnancy which the terms of the public discussion deny.

I am not saying that the technologies themselves demean motherhood; that's another issue. What I am saying is that these technologies draw their meaning from the cultural and political climate in which they are embedded – from a climate in which there is considerable ambivalence about pregnancy, and a tendency to value the product of pregnancy and childbirth (the foetus, the infant) over the mother. The focus of the new conceptive technologies is not really 'infertility' (as the proposed restrictions on their use should make clear), nor is it even 'the family'. Ultimately, the focus is 'babies' and their precursors, foetuses and embryos.

Babies make news, in a way that mothers or would-be mothers don't. The extent of the controversy over the Liverpool septuplets is, in a sad way, a confirmation of this. For although the dangers of multiple pregnancies have long been known in medical circles, the 'fertility drugs', in widespread use since the 1960s, have by and large escaped public controversy until now. Techniques such as in vitro fertilisation or artificial insemination have, on the other hand, been the subject of numerous inquiries and investigations. It appears that reproductive technologies which involve the handling of semen and eggs outside the human body more readily stir unease than those which operate – with whatever risks – on the woman's body alone. Babies legitimate the use of new conceptive technologies in very powerful ways, often to the exclusion of questions about the impact of those technologies on women.

'Ultimately the focus is "babies" and their precursors: foetuses and embryos'

In spite of hectic public discussion of reproductive technologies, it has been left to feminists to raise these sorts of questions about the impact of reproductive technology on the current and future lives of women. What does it mean for women's health, safety and their choices about reproduction that the patients whose bodies will be the vehicles for the new technologies are overwhelmingly female, while the people who design, test, approve and apply the technologies – the embryologists, the molecular biologists, the obstetricians and gynaecologists, or 'the pharmacrats' as Gena Corea puts it – are overwhelmingly male?

The most prominent feminist approach sees in these new techniques a means for men to wrest reproduction itself from women. Following the arguments of the feminist writer, Mary O'Brien[3], it is suggested that men's alienation from reproduction – men's sense of disconnection from their seed during the process of conception, pregnancy and birth – has underpinned through the ages a relentless male desire to master nature, and to construct social institutions and cultural patterns that will not only subdue the waywardness of women but also give men an illusion of procreative continuity and power.

New reproductive technologies are the vehicle that will turn men's illusions of reproductive power into a reality. By manipulating eggs and embryos, scientists will determine the sort of children who are born and will make themselves the fathers of humankind. By removing eggs and embryos from some women and implanting them in others, medical practitioners will gain unprecedented control over motherhood itself. Motherhood as a unified biological process will be effectively deconstructed: in place of 'mother', there will be ovarian mothers who supply eggs, uterine mothers who give birth to children and, presumably, social mothers who raise them. Through the eventual development of artificial wombs, the capacity will arise to make biological motherhood redundant. Whether or not women are eliminated, or merely reduced to the level of 'reproductive prostitutes' the object and the effect of the emergent technologies is allegedly to undermine motherhood and to destroy the claim to reproduction that is the foundation of women's identity.

The problem with this analysis is not that it is too radical, as some have claimed. Rather, in seeking to protect women from the dangers of new technologies, it gives too much away. It tends to echo the very views of scientific and medical practice, of women and of motherhood which feminists have been seeking to transform. This analysis entails, in the first instance, an inflated view of science and medicine, the mirror image of that which scientists and medical practitioners often themselves try to promote. By emphasising the continuities between technologies currently in clinical use, and those that exist merely in the fantasies of scientific commentators; by insisting that the practices involved in animal husbandry or in animal experimentation can unproblematically be transferred to human beings; by ignoring the ways in which women have resisted abuses of medical power and techniques they found unacceptable: by arguing in this way, science and medicine are portrayed as realms of boundless possibility, in the face of which mere human beings have no choices other than total rejection or capitulation. Any understanding of the constraints within which science and medicine operate, and of the way these can be shaped for the greater protection of women and men, is effectively erased.

Also integral to this approach is a view of women that comes uncomfortably close to that espoused by some members of the medical professions. Infertile women are too easily 'blinded by science'; they are 'manipulated' into uncritical support of any technique which will produce those desired children; the choices they make and even their motivations to choose are controlled by men. In the case of doctors, it is the 'maternal instinct' that allows women's own assessments of what they want from their bodies or their pregnancies to be overlooked; in this analysis, it is patriarchal and pronatal conditioning that makes infertile women (and, by implication, all women) incapable of rational choice. The ideology of motherhood does attempt to press women (or, at least, women deemed suitable by virtue of marital status, sexual preference or ethnic origins) in the direction of child-bearing, and in this sense women's motivations are socially shaped. But 'shaped' is not the same as 'determined'; and a rejection of child-bearing (for infertile or fertile women) is not necessarily a more authentic choice. The very existence of a range of sanctions and rewards designed to entice women into marriage and motherhood indicates, not that conformity is guaranteed, but that avoidance of motherhood (and mother-

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hood outside of conventional marriage) are genuine options, which efforts are made to contain.

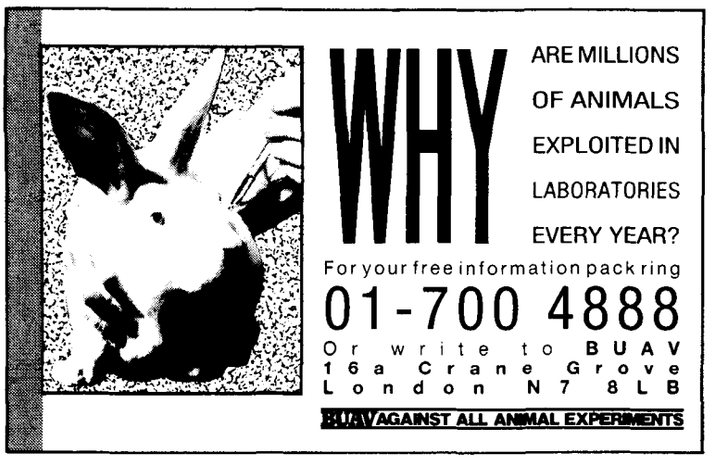
Finally, this approach tends to suggest that anything 'less' than a natural process, from conception through to birth, represents the degradation of motherhood itself. The motherhood that men are attempting to usurp becomes one that is biologically-defined, and to which all women are assumed to have the same relationship. While it is the case that the lives of all women are shaped by their biological selves, and by their assumed or actual capacity to bear children, our bodies do not impose upon us a common experience of reproduction. On the contrary, our bodies stand as powerful reminders of the differentiating effects of age, health, disability, strength and fertility history. There is, moreover, little reason to assume that the biological potential to give birth has an identical meaning for women, regardless of their social circumstances or their wishes in relation to child-bearing. How can the experience of women who have chosen to remain child free be fitted into a framework that sees the continuous biological process that culminates in birth as the core of our identity? How can we make sense from this perspective of women who value children highly, but who experience pregnancy itself as merely an unpleasant reality en route to raising children? How can we explain the fact that fewer working-class women attend antenatal clinics, demand natural childbirth or breast-feed their infants? While for many middle-class women pregnancy may be a scarce resource – time out from a hectic professional life to enjoy the sensations of being a woman – for a greater proportion of working-class women pregnancy may be more a taken-for-granted prelude to social motherhood, not an experience to be cherished in itself. The reproductive care provided to women is all too often insensitive to their own wishes and desires. But shared reactions to unsatisfactory medical treatment should not be allowed to mask differences in women's own sense of what authentic motherhood might be. Women may legitimately, as the American anthropologist and feminist Rayna Rapp said, 'want other things from reproductive technology than merely to get it off our backs'[4].

'Science and medicine have been portrayed as realms of boundless possibility'

Reproductive technologies need to be put firmly in their place, as one dimension – but not necessarily the most important – of the forces that shape reproduction and the lives of women, men and children today. An overemphasis upon technology risks detracting attention from the politics and organisation of health care in general, from the legal system which frames our rights over our bodies and our children, from political struggles over the nature of sexuality, parenthood and the family, and from the impact of the varied material and cultural circumstances in which people create their personal lives. That is why a singular focus on the experience of the Haltons at the time the septuplets were born can give a quite misleading picture about the meaning of reproductive technology today. The newspapers may direct our attention to the sad circumstances of the Halton babies, but in doing so they stifle any inquiry into the complex experience of infertility, the shortcomings of the services available to women (and to men), and the ways in which these services are controlled. It is not helpful either to go to another extreme and see infertile women as merely passive victims of these processes. The meaning of reproductive technologies can only be grasped by understanding the diverse wishes and requirements of women, and the way that they are currently under-served by medical and social arrangements. ●

[1] B Berger and P Berger, *The War Over The Family*, 1983 p149
[2] Cited in H Holmes, B Hoskins & M Gross (eds), *The Custom-Made Child?*, Humana Press, 1981.
[3] *The Politics of Reproduction*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.
[4] 'Feminists and Pharmacrats' in *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol II, No 10, July 1985.

Reproductive Technologies, edited by Michelle Stanworth, has just been published by Polity Press. Michelle would particularly like to thank three of the contributors – Lesley Doyal, Ros Petchesky and Naomi Pfeffer – whose ideas inform much of what is written above.



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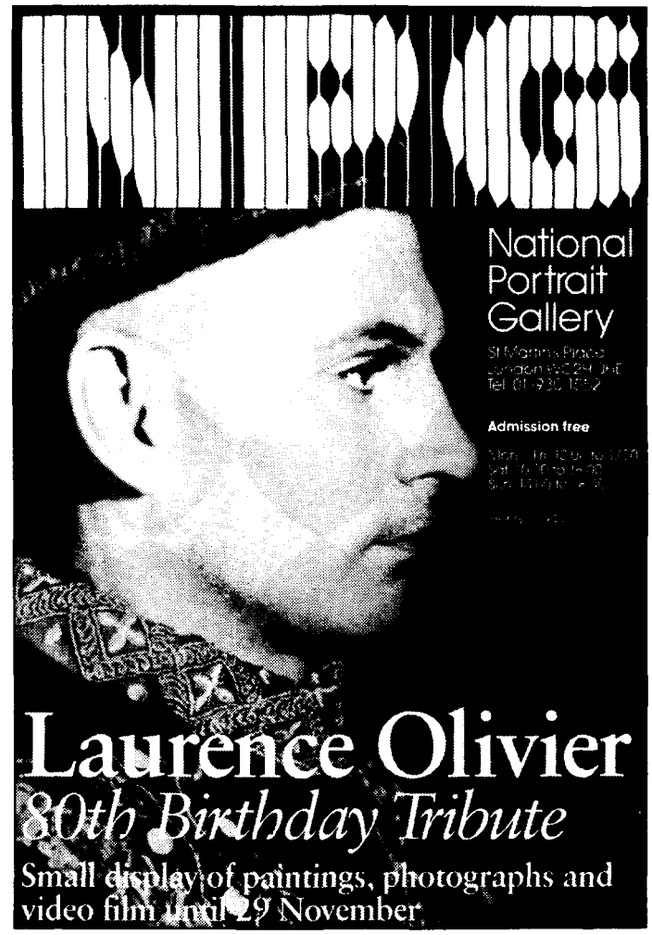

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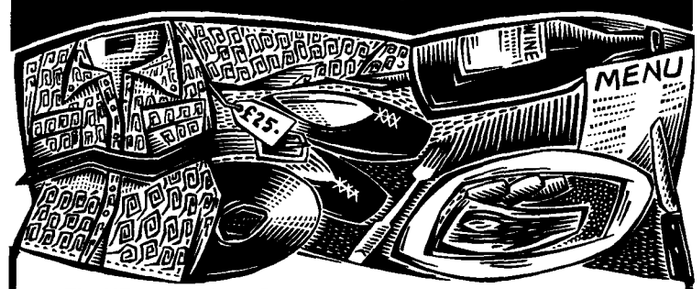

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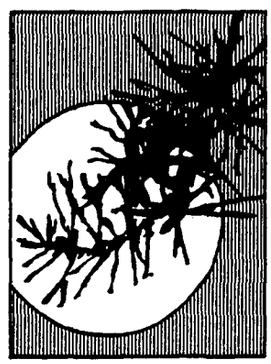

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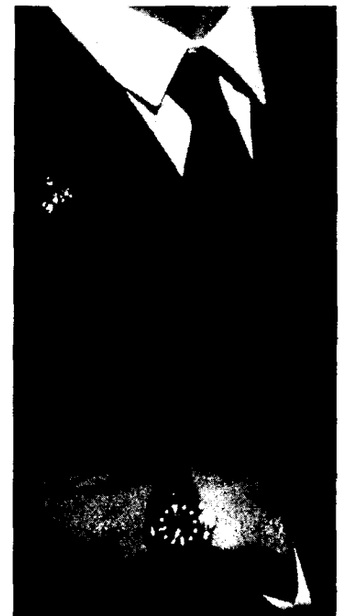

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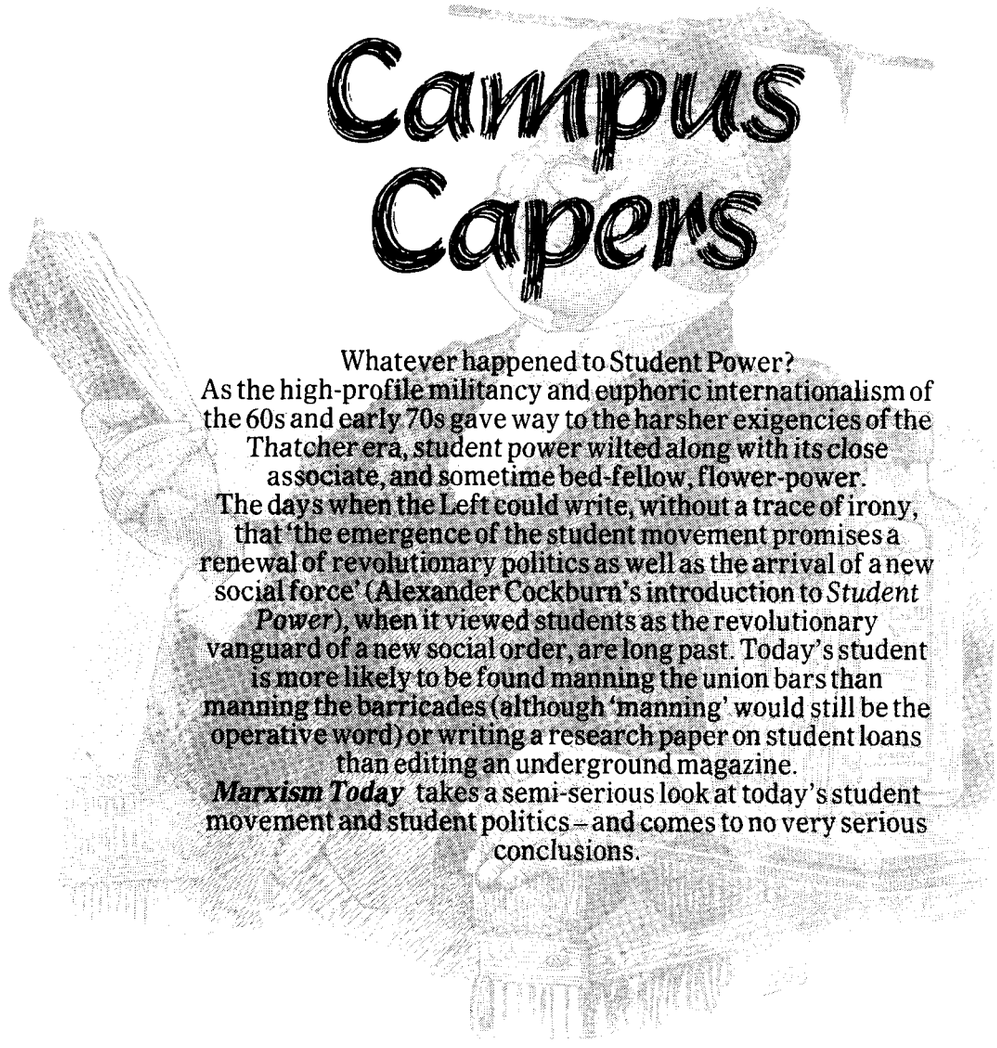

Whatever happened to Student Power? As the high-profile militancy and euphoric internationalism of the 60s and early 70s gave way to the harsher exigencies of the Thatcher era, student power wilted along with its close associate, and sometime bed-fellow, flower-power. The days when the Left could write, without a trace of irony, that 'the emergence of the student movement promises a renewal of revolutionary politics as well as the arrival of a new social force' (Alexander Cockburn's introduction to *Student Power*), when it viewed students as the revolutionary vanguard of a new social order, are long past. Today's student is more likely to be found manning the union bars than manning the barricades (although 'manning' would still be the operative word) or writing a research paper on student loans than editing an underground magazine. ***Marxism Today*** takes a semi-serious look at today's student movement and student politics – and comes to no very serious conclusions.

They Shall Not Pass

Admission to *Marxism Today's* list of tame speakers has meant that I've been seeing more of the inside of buildings named after Nelson Mandela than I have for a few years, and what a familiar world it is. I had assumed that about the only things that hadn't changed in student political life since I left university were that Mandela was in jail, Thatcher was in power, and students couldn't do anything about either. In fact, it seems at times as though the students of Britain have vowed to suspend their political development until the South African leader is freed.

Unfair, I'm sure. But there you are, in a political meeting, grappling self-consciously with the ideological, and you wonder why the youth in the front row is staring at you so balefully; and then he opens his mouth to loftily dismiss you for inadequate attention to the industrial proletariat. The most malign influence in student politics is the presence in colleges of thousands of males, in transition from adolescence to adulthood, who seem to think they should establish themselves in the manner of young male moose or monkeys; by aggression, territoriality and the subordination of females. Above all, they are competitive, particularly with males whom they perceive as enjoying higher status. It doesn't really square with the ideals of academic debate, let alone those of comradeship.

A telling detail of these meetings is the way in which the women present tend to keep quiet until the formal discussion is closed. It's then that you get the shyer inquiries, the smiles and the gestures of normal social empathy.

The youths have developed in one respect: they've become funky; all baseball caps and trendy haircuts. They tend to hang around the ultra-Left party that is really easy to join; members can be either mad or stupid. Its newer competitor is jesuitically difficult to join, choosing its positions to deter the faint-hearted, and requiring cadres to be both mad and brainy.

It also demands a grasp of a quintessentially intellectual concept: the hypothetical. 'Let us assume we are about to take power': what could be more donnish? You may composite your UGM motion *as if* it made any difference to the outside world; it may be a genuinely valuable form of play, rehearsing procedures for future application.

Admitting the playful nature of the process would make it less of a conduit for emotion, and would do nothing for the players' self-esteem. But it might help if new generations of activists realised that, for instance, a city council is not just a student union with lots of working-class members.

And then there is the fate of students, beguiled by slogans from distant places and times, who neglect their studies. They Shall Not Pass. ●

Marek Kohn

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The Women's Campaign

It took a sustained campaign by women within their student movement to establish a women's unit and a women's conference in their national membership organisation, the NUS. It's taken even longer and even more determined campaigning to finally achieve a national executive officer with special responsibility for women students. Just two months ago Julie Grant was elected first national Women's Officer of the NUS. *Marxism Today* talked to her about the particular needs and problems of women students and about the necessarily changing role of the student unions in the face of the Thatcherite education project.

With a Women's Unit and a Women's Conference already successfully established within the NUS, was a Women's Officer really a priority?
The Women's Unit had no funding, no control. The national executive didn't have to reflect in the national union's work what women students actually wanted or needed. We were frustrated by lack of power and lack of resources and felt we had to change things within the NUS if it was to be genuinely democratic, more representative, more relevant and accessible to women and much more sensitive to their specific needs and expectations.

It might be argued, in some quarters at least, that the campaign for a Women's Officer has deflected or obscured the needs of other disadvantaged groups, like working-class and black students.
I don't follow that line of argument that says by supporting one group you withdraw support from others. This is the route that women have chosen to follow; other groups may or may not elect to do likewise, but either way we'll support them. The NUS is a membership organisation and, quite simply, this was one of the issues the membership wanted us to campaign on.

Can you identify for us some of the main difficulties that women students face?
That's a huge question and one we can only touch on here. At its simplest it's a problem firstly of access and secondly of sheer survival. Apart from the initial bias against them entering higher education there are additional barriers for women which make it more difficult for them than for men to complete courses and achieve good degrees – and these problems are even more acute for working-class and black women. Traditional student life and the traditional, stereotypical image of the student excludes women, socially, culturally and politically. And the sexism which is endemic in our education system – and which finds its crudest expression in sexual harassment – is a major cause of women 'dropping out' of education. The unequal power relations between students and teachers are compounded when the teacher is a man and the students are women. We aim to raise the level of awareness of sexual harassment, both at the day-to-day level and at the level where it can determine the outcome of a woman's whole future.

How would you assess the current mood of the student movement in general and the NUS in particular? There seems, on the face of it, to be an air of general political inertia and a concentration on narrowly parochial issues in comparison with the high-profile activism and internationalism of a few years back. There is even talk of a rightward swing.
There is an attitude, and I think it's a mistaken one, that the student movement is quiet. In fact the student unions have been extremely active recently and there has been a high level of politicisation over loans. That level of politicisation will be maintained and we'll be ready for 'top-up' loans and anything else the government has to throw at us. In Scotland, Labour students have made major gains over the proposed introduction of a student poll-tax and the student campaign against apartheid has been a major factor in Barclays pulling out of South Africa. And there were higher levels of politicisation and expectation during the last general election than at any other, with greater numbers of students getting out and voting and campaigning. All this indicates that the movement *is* still active – active on a more serious and well-informed level than before. We tend to think of 'active' as rampaging through the streets. The movement has shown itself recently to be more mature and more prepared to take long-term, considered views on political issues.

What about the miners' strike?
The miners' strike was a good example of student solidarity. But that kind of solidarity doesn't get press coverage. Lesbian and gay students supporting the miners doesn't get media attention, doesn't get recognised by the people who get to write the articles about whether the movement is active or not. Those kinds of people wouldn't recognise activism unless it hit them over the head. Today the student unions are not just campaigning on issues the traditional student activist wants, but on what the activist who is involved in his or her community and across a range of political groupings wants.

What sort of effect has the women's campaign had on the structure of the NUS?
I believe the women's campaign has had a considerable effect. It has extended democracy in terms of women's participation. We've managed to set up a fully delegate-based national conference to which delegates are elected by women in cross-campus ballots, and which elects a member straight on to the national executive. I think that's a very healthy development. And a radical development. I don't know of any other similar organisation that does this. They may be talking about it, aiming for it, but they haven't actually implemented it.

Will the NUS be strong enough to withstand a third term of Thatcherism?
Our work on equal opportunities over the coming year – not just for women but for black, gay and lesbian students and disabled students too, is going to put us in a very strong position. I think that more of our membership than ever before is involved, interested and participating in the NUS. The problem is that the critics don't recognise participation; they don't know what it means. The NUS will be actively, not quietly, working away with its membership to achieve real gains in the coming year.

Finally, how will you set about ensuring that women can become more involved in their student unions?
There are lots of problems about getting women involved. Problems like child-care, like the atmosphere in the student unions, like the kind of sexism which says women can do the typing and hand out the leaflets and that men will make the speeches. Even when women are involved it's at a menial level, supporting and servicing men so that they can do the 'real' political work. The NUS has faced up to this. It's what the campaign for a women's officer was all about. The national union is weaker when it excludes its women, that's my argument. It took some time to win that one! ●

Style Counsel

Two terms that have never been particularly good classmates are 'students' and 'style.' But with recent shiftings in cultural classification, it's time to traverse the intersections of street and study, and examine student style ... beyond the college sweatshirt jeaneration.

It's a return to the school year with a return to school wear. The latest taste in uniform fetishism transcends the simple expression of childhood fantasies when placed in the academic context where it shines as the epitome of 'back to school' pastiche. To be seen on campus cultivating a critique in blazers, skirts or shorts (or both) and knee-length stockings, with ties and scarves as optional accessories, is the simplest spectacle of autumnal parody.

For engagements in the lecture league, the post-casual consciousness can simultaneously manifest and disperse itself amid the diversity of serious styles in contemporary micro-sports wear. For those quick off the mark, the trans-activity look of baseball cap and cycling shirt worn with rock climbing leggings (or surf shorts for the suitably wiped out), without forgetting the mandatory 'all year, all wear' pair of trainers, are essential to be seen sporting in a slightly strenuous yet perfunctory state of attention.

International inclinations are also well positioned, with a cross cultural mélange, underwritten in overwear of Stateside design in the form of baseball, quilted and flight jackets arrayed in the latest display of glasnost chic, while that perennial item of attire, the T-Shirt, is continuously de/re-politicised with a multiplicity of graphics, ranging from campaign to Chanel logos. All of this is impeccably touched in the finish with true form in an evergreen pair of homegrown Doc Martens.

With the foundations of trend topography displayed, the financial foundations of fashionable purchase are quite obvious. The manner in which limited (grant) resources are spent, is, after all, a question of style. ●

Darryl Moore

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Campus Novel

When the university teachers of English leave the lecture theatre for the word processor and turn to fiction, we generally end up with the campus novel. The paranoid polytechnic lecturer in Howard Jacobson's *Coming From Behind* envied the inhabitants of Bradbury Lodge, the jetsetting, novel-writing successful academics. But the comic novels of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge have always left me with a sense of unease, their ideological project seems to be a domesticating of literary theory by mocking its more 'extreme' and 'foreign' versions, while their writing hides a conventional English novel of middle-aged, middle-class doubt beneath a veneer of post-modernist self-consciousness (fiction's awareness of itself as fiction, invention and language). The novels' view of universities often mirrors the wildest fantasies of the *Daily Mail:* overpaid, oversexed, underworked academics only seeing students for fleeting affairs before they fly off to another conference. The actual state of higher education, bruised and battered by Thatcherite rigour, disappears.

Terry Eagleton's first novel, **Saints and Scholars**, shows one of Britain's leading marxist critics avoiding the comic campus and reappropriating another source of liberal laughter. Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* lurks behind **Saints and Scholars**, as Eagleton reworks the comedy of ideas towards radical ends. The novel is set in Ireland at the time of the 1916 Easter Rising, beginning by postponing the execution of James Connolly, allowing him to escape and meet the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, Nikolai Bakhtin, brother of the marxist literary theorist Mikhail, and Leopold Bloom, on leave, as it were, from James Joyce's *Ulysses*. 'A Scottish Irishman, an Irish Hungarian, an anglicised Austrian and a Russian', Connolly, Bloom, Wittgenstein and Bakhtin are the cast of an intellectual joke as well as the participants in a debate between philosophers trying to understand the world and revolutionaries trying to change it. There's a real comic exuberance here, especially in the descriptions of the novel's cities – St Petersburg, Vienna, Dublin. Beckett is also parodied, as Eagleton's characters wait for Godot, with Connolly pursued by the British army and Wittgenstein fearing that he is being chased by Cambridge dons.

The germ of the novel would appear to be Eagleton's 1982 article, 'Wittgenstein's Friends', collected in *Against the Grain*. And the book relates to Eagleton's other work, on Walter Benjamin's ideas of history, and, more generally, on the debate between marxism and post-structuralism. It does this with wit, juggling difficult ideas with a performer's skill, and juxtaposing fantasy and history, comedy and revolution, to great effect. ●

Duncan Webster

Bad Press

Listen to a student apply for a summer job if ever you need proof of genuine embarrassment about status. Lumped together by the media as a social class of stereotypes with knee-jerk reactions, a non-productive part of a lean British economy, students are starting to believe their own bad press.

Students seem to lap up a culture that hates them. *NME* campus concert reviews thrive off the 'students can't dance and students wear crap clothes' critique yet they continue to buy the magazine in ever-increasing numbers. Real life is seen as something which goes on in a world *outside* higher education where people pay taxes and wear proper trousers.

Bank advertising dishes up old-favourite stereotypes that haven't changed for years: students bored by their oppressive parents (no way will Midland students wear duffle coats or college scarves on the prompting of their mother) and blatantly smug ('naturally I chose a bank that showed a clear understanding of the working of the free market economy' says the young Lloyds' client). Hardly subliminal advertising techniques reaching into the student psyche.

The *Animal House* and *The Young Ones* stereotypes work on several levels. Students can laugh at moonies and jobbie sandwiches as easily as a six-year-old, safe in their knowledge of Kafka's early novels and the background to the Gulf crisis. The humour is always directed against someone else, someone ignorant.

The media work on three broad male stereotypes: the young fogey, president of the dining club, who wears Church's brogues bequeathed by his father and 'Will power' badges; the hep, born in crepe-soled boots with discrete enamel badges of Battleship Potempkin bought in Red Square; and the rugby-playing chemist who knows the words to 'take it off, take it off, sang the boys in the back' and wears Adidas Samba trainers and badges saying 'Ignore me I'm pissed'. Certain key characteristics of these sophisticated stereotypes are isolated by programme makers and occasionally juggled around for anthropological effect (like the proposed ITV sitcom of the Lefty who wears brogues).

The media saw student politics after the 60s as a few rotten tomatoes in the faces of famous politicians and not much more. That is why *Citizen Smith* dressed like Che Guevera and talked in cliches and Rick of *The Young Ones* was Anarchist and Militant turn and turn about; both were figures of fun in a medium that was laughing at the flimsiness of their politics. The media created and dismissed the Loony Left just as easily.

But to see student politics now, you can appreciate Rick has a lot to answer for. The causes of the Left are as valid as ever, but the voices are quieter and more self-conscious. Not because students are shifting to the Right, but because at last they have come up against the one stereotype that worries them: that of the hack.

Television is only interested in two student stereotypes. There's the ambitious all-rounder (like Jeremy Irons, usually at a redbrick university or Oxbridge) and the dosser like Ade Edmondson. In a testy recruitment quiz in the student press, the army attempts to sort out one stereotype from another; the A's in one pile, C's in another. A's would tell the coach to stuff it if he (by no stretch of the imagination was this ad aimed at a she) was dropped from the rugger team by the coach in favour of an inferior player. The decent chaps, the C's, would just damn well impress coach at the next training session round the quad. Is there really nothing in between? Will the B's *please* come forward? ●

Richard Johnson

Not Standing Aloan

Since 1978/79 the real value of the student grant has fallen by 21%. In the same period parental contributions have risen by 185%. The average student is currently left with £3.96 a week or 57 pence a day to spend during term time after paying for food, accommodation, travel, books, equipment and clothing. These sobering statistics from the NUS reveal the extent to which the all-grant system of student finance that was introduced in 1962 has broken down.

As students continue to campaign for the reform of the grant system, they are also fighting off the government's proposals to abolish it and introduce student loans. Uniting under the slogans 'We Won't Stand Aloan!' and 'Living Grant, Not A Life In Debt!', students from all backgrounds have campaigned to reject the loan scheme. In 1984/85 an imaginative and well organised campaign, and the reluctance of the major banks to back the government's student loan proposals, led to a dramatic government 'U' turn. More recently education secretary Kenneth Baker has focused media attention on secondary education. But the loan scheme has not gone away.

Now there is talk of a top-up, or partial loan system. The NUS is responding with a sustained campaign. Armed with an impressive research document which pin-points the major deficiencies of loan systems in North America and Scandinavia, they are able to refute each line of the government's defence of the loan option. Experience in North America and Scandinavia suggests that loan schemes are expensive to initiate and to maintain. They discourage the participation of students from working-class backgrounds, women, ethnic minorities, the disabled; any group which traditionally has lower salaries than white, middle-class men and would probably find it more difficult to pay back a loan. Loans would not improve access to further and higher education to all those willing and able to benefit from it.

Mobilising and maintaining a national opposition of students and parents, educationalists and political organisations across party lines is necessary to ensure that this element of the Thatcherite project is resisted. ●

Chris Granlund

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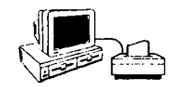

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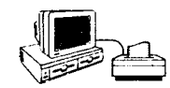

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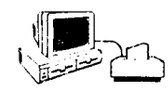

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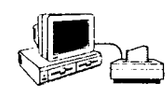

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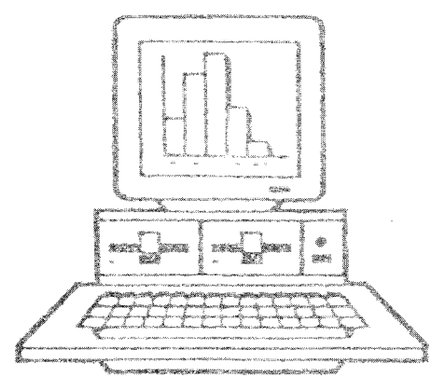

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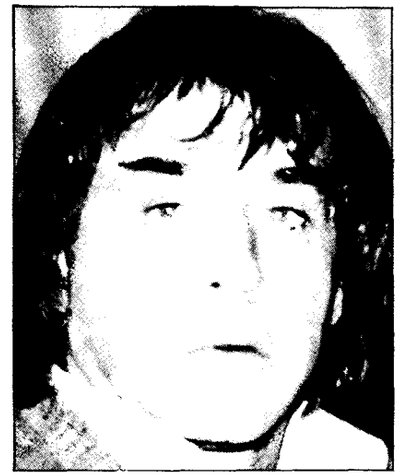
Happy Birthday To Us

Marxism Today is 30 this month. Despite approaching early middle age, we still seem to be growing – and far from settling down, we seem to be causing more bother and raising more eyebrows than ever before. We asked an unscientifically selected group of readers what *Marxism Today* means to them



I get *Marxism Today*. I read it. I welcomed the new format and *MT* quite frequently figures in my work and in my social discourse, although I wish it were less London-centred. *MT* has not yet made itself necessary as a journal but it's on the way.
Trevor Griffiths (playwright)

I always read *Marxism Today*. I don't always agree with it but I think it is a stylish, well-written and beautifully produced magazine. It makes a unique and important contribution to debates on the Left. In particular, it has made an important intervention in the debate around the relationship between race, sex and class. I wish it another successful 30 years.
Diane Abbott (Labour MP)

Having foreseen the Steel-Owen divorce in *Marxism Today* last March, I am delighted to pay my respects on your 30th birthday. For a bourgeois magazine to include the views of a simple working-class lad like myself proves what a grand job you're doing. I wonder if Harry Pollitt reads the wine column.
Derek Jameson (broadcaster)

Marxism Today is always worth reading even when it's wrong.
Clare Short (Labour MP)

I'm extremely glad that the Marx brothers' memory is being kept alive since their films were among my favourites. Was it Karl who sang?
Muriel Grey (broadcaster)

Marxism Today is essential reading for everyone involved in political and democratic questions. Where else could you get such thoughtful and informative pieces? Happy birthday – warmest congratulations. Lang mae yer lum reek.
Gordon McLennan (General Secretary, Communist Party)

Reading *Marxism Today* gives me a bit of mental space in a crowded world. As a woman, however, I would prefer that it enabled me to *take* space.
Inez McCormack (trade union official)

For most of its 30 year life, *Marxism Today* has served with honour the development of marxist-leninist theory; we are sure it will return to its historical role again in the future.
Tony Chater (editor, *Morning Star*)

Marxism Today has been vital in moving the issue of democracy and the future of socialism to the centre of political debate in Britain.
Ken Livingstone (Labour MP)

Marxism Today means I have a grip on the world. I never bullshit without a copy under my arm.
Pat Kane (musician, Hue and Cry)

Marxism Today is to me like an extremely bright, cheerful little rodent, with bright-rimmed glasses and a bow tie, leaping off a sinking ship.
Michael Ignatieff (writer)

To me *Marxism Today* means a controversial and very readable journal, one that produces controversy by speaking uncomfortable truths, saying things the Left does not always want to hear. However, it must beware of a growing tendency to produce controversy for its own sake. I feel that it has reached a critical juncture; a point where it must be careful not to alienate its readership while maintaining its valuable, and necessary, cutting edge.
David Blunkett (Labour MP)

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I hate being caught on the spot! I get most of my political education from conversations with friends and musicians. When I do see *Marxism Today*, it's a good read.
Sarah Jane Morris (musician)

I enjoy quarrelling with *Marxism Today*. In the average article my 'yes-but's usually start around paragraph three. I like its intellectual honesty. It rarely takes refuge in 'scapegoating' or in knee-jerk rhetoric of the 'Thatcher's vicious attacks on' variety. I think its title is misleading. I see very little which is classically marxist in its analysis, which is presumably why so many marxists hate it. *Socialism For The Thinking Yuppie* may not be a snappy title but would undoubtedly be a more accurate one.
Ann Leslie (journalist, *Daily Mail*)

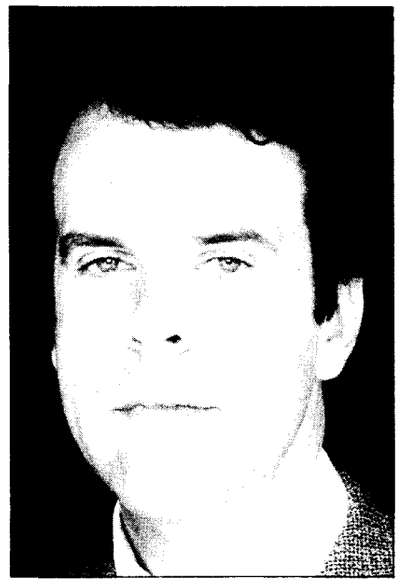
Best wishes to *Marxism Today* for many tomorrows.
Neil Kinnock (leader of the Labour Party)

It is very useful to have the credo of the greatest ideological influence of the 20th century expressed in such a readable and regular manner.
Melvyn Bragg (broadcaster)

Marxism Today is to marxism what Eddie Shah is to *Today*.
Ann Pettifor (Labour activist)

You've still got your complement of petty-marxists who spin their beliefs out with all the finesse of single issue fanatics everywhere. Nevertheless you do have some writers who are not ideological about their ideologies. If there was a second coming, I'm sure *He* would write for you.
John McVicar (journalist)

It makes me think.
George Bolton (president, Scottish NUM)



The great thing about *Marxism Today*, and especially Martin Jacques, was the courage in taking on established and often fossilised thinking on the Left at a time when to challenge that thinking was regarded as divisive and heretical. *Marxism Today* opened up, for anyone on the Left prepared to think, major areas of policy and of culture which had been dust-covered for too long and made the job of others like myself much easier.
John Lloyd (editor, *New Statesman*)

Why does *Marxism Today* keep asking questions like this? If you must know I've just given myself an advance birthday present and taken out a sub to *MT*. I can't bear to be without it.
Joan Ruddock (Labour MP)

I try to apply my political ideas and feelings to everything I do – I read *Marxism Today* because it does the same. We don't always agree but I enjoy it more when we think differently than when we think alike.
Jill Tweedie (writer)

Marxism Today has been something almost entirely new on the Left: always open-minded, striving to be fair to its opponents, usually jargon-free, and often a pleasure to read. It is thus inescapably a symptom of the decline of socialism.
Ferdinand Mount (journalist, *The Spectator*)

As a musician I find *Marxism Today* useful. It takes cultural politics seriously and has become a major force on the Left.
Simon Booth (musician, Working Week)

Marxism Today has long provided a significant forum for discussions about socialism and we now need to extend the dialogue to include all those who are on the Left.
Tony Benn (Labour MP)

Marxism Today is an early warning system for the movement. You don't always agree with what it says, but you cannot disregard it.
Tom Sawyer (deputy general secretary, NUPE)

Oh, that's heavy . . . I never read it. I don't know anything about it.
Paul Smith (fashion designer)

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After The Apocalypse

The impact of the Vietnamese war on Western politics was enormous. It led to the greatest solidarity movement since 1945. But what happened to the Vietnamese revolution *after* the defeat of the Americans in 1975? **Adam Fforde** shows the picture is far from simple

Vietnam should, and could, be a rich country. It has rubber, coffee, tea and other valuable tropical commodities; it has coal in the north, oil and gas in the south, plus tin, iron, bauxite and other mineral resources. Furthermore, the Vietnamese are a historical nation, and unlike many other developing countries have centuries of experience in administering centralised nation-states. The population is comparatively well-educated, with a traditional respect for literary endeavour and literacy levels well above the average for countries at similar levels of development. After years of violence people have a longing for peace and prosperity.

But they are nowadays fated to life under conditions of deepening economic crisis and extreme tension, with city-dwellers unable to live on official salaries, and forced to take extra jobs in order to cope with rates of inflation of over 500%. After more than a decade of peace, living conditions in Hanoi have shown few signs of improvement. In the over-crowded rural areas of the north, the ever-rising population confronts stagnating food output, threatening a deep structural crisis. Much state industry operates uneconomically, sucking in valuable resources better used elsewhere. Life for most is still hard, and people lack the peace of mind they seek. After a short period of positive per capita growth in the early 1980s, there are now fears of an abrupt slowdown if effective reforms are blocked by vested interests and political stalemate.

This state of affairs is, for most foreigners as well as many Vietnamese, astonishing. How is it that the country that defeated the French and the Americans could make such a mess of the peace? One hears many arguments, some of which sound like excuses, but nevertheless are partly true – the need to reconstruct a war-damaged area; the deep scars left from the traumatic experiences of the wars; bad weather at crucial stages in the development programme; and so on. One thing is clear, however, which is that the leadership's lack of experience in peacetime administration cannot be blamed, for between 1955, when the French finally left the north, and 1964-5, when heavy US bombing started, the old Democratic Republic of (north) Vietnam (DRV) experienced a decade of peace during which every effort was made to implement socialist development based upon the (pre-Gorbachev) Soviet model. Agriculture was collectivised, industry nationalised, and the substantial aid supplied by the Soviet bloc and China concentrated upon priority investment in state industry. However, this programme failed to create sustainable growth. Yet after 1975 the same leadership sought to impose the very same development model upon the re-united country.

It is the assumptions behind that model, and the consequences for north Vietnamese society of its inapplicability to north Vietnamese conditions, that go a long way towards explaining the present situation. The failure to generate independent growth in the DRV created an import-dependent and grossly imbalanced economy with an over-grown state industry and bureaucracy that placed an impossible load upon a very poor area. After 1965, however, the adverse implications of this precocious over-development were hidden by massive levels of wartime aid. This was so large that contemporary US analyses suggested that per capita incomes actually rose in 1965-68, during the period of the most intense bombing. But during the war the underlying economic tensions created by the excessive growth of state industry and employment worsened as socialist construction continued. Perhaps contrary to many people's expectations, official data shows that industrial output and state employment grew between 1965 and 1970, the latter by nearly 50%. Once peace returned, and sustainable growth was sought, this burden would have major consequences. The failure of the development programme prior to 1965 had created an ineffective and artificially-supported system, which unfortunately became the vehicle for postwar construction.

A question that is rather hard to answer is just why Vietnam's top leaders maintained their commitment to the DRV's development model after 1975 despite its acute problems. Their personal experiences must surely play a major role. Vietnam's national liberation struggle was long and bloody, so for them national independence was a lifetime's task. Although now often in 'official retirement', Vietnam's most senior leaders still possess revolutionary records going back to the French white terror of the 1930s. Most have spent their lives committed to the belief that progress meant socialist revolution as epitomised by the Soviet model. For this ideal they sacrificed much. Naturally, wartime propaganda linked the national liberation struggle to the socialist revolution. Furthermore, during the war, foreign visitors, and to an extent US propaganda too, helped build up the idea that the DRV was strongly and effectively governed, promoting mass support for the government, the party, the liberation struggle and the socialist revolution. How else could they explain the performance of northern soldiers confronted with US military technology?

Perhaps such a combination of conservatism and idealism explains why, after 1975, Vietnam's leaders continued to argue that 'the national and socialist revolutions are one'. In any case, immediately after national reunification there is little evidence of public debate about the basic flaws in the DRV's development model, at least none to compare with what was to come later. But outside the country, the natural postwar re-examination of the evidence is beginning to reveal just what had in fact happened before 1965 in the DRV, and to uncover the adverse consequences of implementing the Soviet model under north Vietnamese conditions.

After 1975 and the end of the war, Vietnam enjoyed rather favourable international conditions. She could call upon aid from both China and the USSR and had access to Western funds, although the US sought to block access to the World Bank and other multilateral donors. In fact, Vietnam managed to borrow some $2-3 billion in hard currency between 1976 and 1978. The wide range of aid

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History Of The Vietnamese Revolution

1884: Vietnam loses its independence to become a French colony, part of French Indochina.

Feb 1930: Founding conference of the Indochinese Communist Party, led by Nguyen Ai Quoc, later to take the name Ho Chi Minh.

1941: Japanese troops occupy much of Vietnam. Foundation of the Viet Minh (League for Vietnamese Independence), a broad-based national liberation movement. While the Communist Party always enjoyed a privileged position within it, the Viet Minh rapidly becomes a powerful hegemonic force.

Aug-Sept 1945: The Viet Minh launches a general uprising. The authorities surrender to Ho Chi Minh's provisional government. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam is proclaimed in Hanoi on September 2, 1945.

1945-6: Initially helped by British troops, the French expeditionary force regains control of Saigon and gradually reoccupies the country. On Dec 19, 1946 Ho Chi Minh launches an appeal for general resistance. The first Indochinese war begins.

1951: The Viet Minh succeeds in liberating the northern provinces of Vietnam, opening up direct supply lines from China and the USSR.

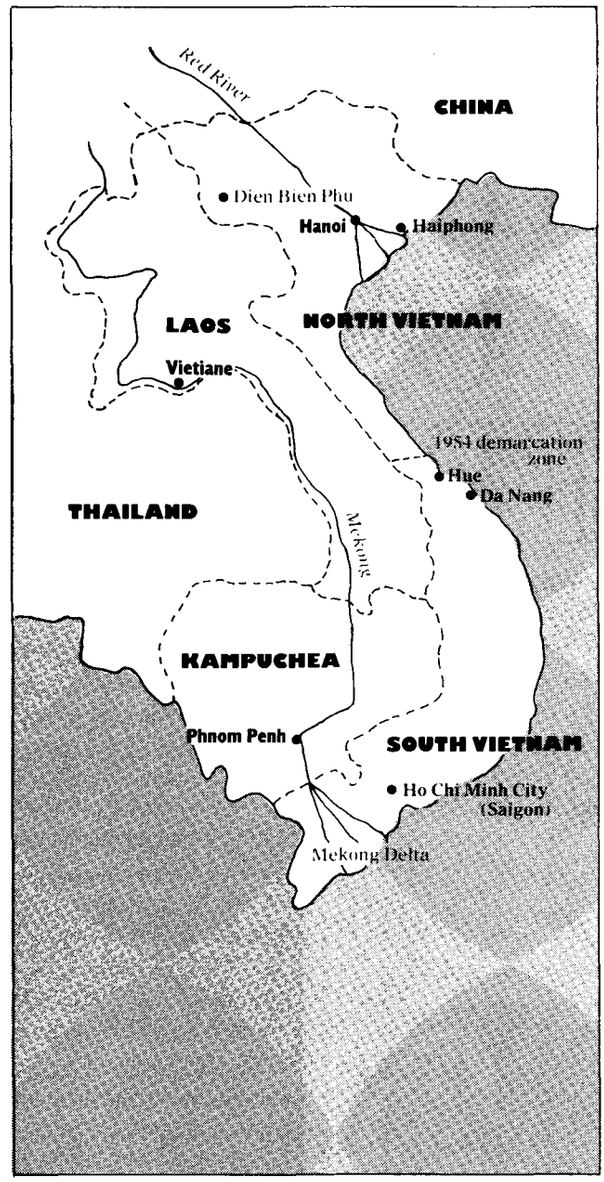
1954: Following a two month battle at Dien Bien Phu the French expeditionary force is routed. The French government falls and peace negotiations start at Geneva.

July 1954: Under the terms of the Geneva agreements, Ho Chi Minh's government is to administer the northern half of the country, while pro-colonial forces regroup in the South. The division of the country is to last no more than two years, pending free elections to choose a national government. These elections never took place – on President Eisenhower's own admission because they would have resulted in an 80% vote for Ho Chi Minh.

1956: The division of the country into North and South Vietnam becomes total. Following the French withdrawal from the South, the US gives full backing to the corrupt and repressive regime of Ngo Dinh Diem.

1960-3: The South Vietnamese NLF (National Liberation Front) is formed. The Kennedy administration starts sending military advisers to help train the Saigon army.

1964-7: US president Lyndon Johnson sends combat troops to Vietnam and orders the bombing of North Vietnam. By early 1968 there are 525,000 US troops in South Vietnam.



1968: The NLF launches the Tèt offensive. This is a watershed in the war. US and South Vietnam government forces are attacked throughout the country, exposing the failure of US policy. President Johnson halts the bombing of the North, declines to stand for re-election, and opens peace negotiations in Paris.

1968-72: Worldwide opposition to the war and a powerful anti-war movement in the US further inhibit American policy in Vietnam. President Nixon attempts to scale down direct US involvement by the so-called 'Vietnamisation' of the war, backed with massive air strikes and defoliation against the NLF and North Vietnamese army.

1972: Nixon orders the blockade of North Vietnam's ports and renews the bombing of North Vietnam, culminating in the Christmas 1972 blitz of Hanoi.

Jan 1973: The Paris Peace Treaty is signed, leading to the complete withdrawal of all US military personnel from South Vietnam.

Spring 1975: A general offensive by North Vietnamese and NLF forces in South Vietnam leads to the rapid collapse of the South Vietnamese army. President Thieu flees the country and on April 30, the liberation forces enter Saigon, soon to be renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

1976: Vietnam is formally reunified. The 4th congress of the Communist Party approves an ambitious programme of economic reconstruction, with priority to 'the rational development of heavy industry'.

1976-77: Repeated border attacks by the Khmer Rouge against Vietnam lead to the rapid deterioration of relations with Kampuchea and China, Kampuchea's main ally. China stops all grant aid and loans to Vietnam. Skirmishes occur along the China – Vietnam border.

1978: Attempts to control private trade lead to a series of confrontations between the authorities and the Hoa, Vietnam's ethnic Chinese community. China intervenes in the dispute, accusing Vietnam of persecuting the Hoa. Many Hoa decide to leave. The exodus of the boat people begins. A disastrous harvest partly due to freak weather conditions compounds the country's problems.

Dec 1978: Vietnam sends troops into Kampuchea and ousts Pol Pot's brutal regime. The intervention leads to Vietnam's complete isolation on the international scene, and the cancellation of many aid projects funded by the West.

March 1979: China attacks Vietnam along its northern border, in order 'to teach it a lesson'. The country is placed on war footing.

1981: Vietnam faces a catastrophic economic situation. The Communist Party central committee announces measures of economic liberalisation, which have the immediate effect of increasing agricultural production.

1982: The Communist Party's 5th congress adopts a report highly critical of its bureaucracy and lack of economic realism.

1986: The country faces severe economic difficulties. Military expenditure is still a serious drain on resources more than a decade after liberation. The 6th Congress of the CPV recognises the party's continued failure to radically improve the country's economic situation and appoints a new general secretary, Nguyen van Linh, with a reputation for economic liberalism. Most of the 'old guard' retire, including ex-prime minister Pham Van Dong and ex-general secretary Truong Chinh. ●

Paddy Farrington

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11 – 1.15 Reaganism and the balance of world forces: with Fred Halliday, Victoria Brittain and Trevor Carter.

Debt, short changing the system: with John Denham, Swasti Mitter and baroness Judith Hart.

2.15 – 5.15 Union aid; peoples sanctions: with SACTU, Dunn's strikers and Eric Clark (Scottish NUM).

Liberation politics; theory and practice: with Ben Turok and Jenny Pearce.

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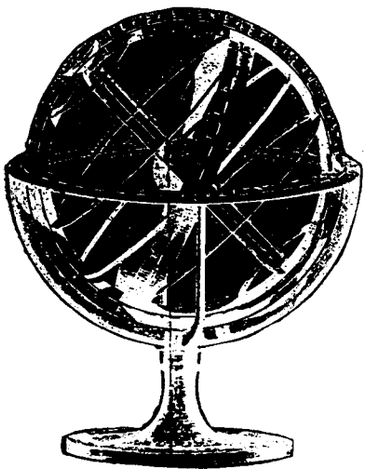

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donors meant that the planners had considerable freedom of choice, and so aid went to those areas deemed to have social priority. This meant on the whole large and ambitiously hi-tech projects deeply unsuited to Vietnamese conditions, and the country today has to cope with the wasted opportunity. Many other factors, such as the large fallow areas in the Mekong delta in the south and the expected postwar release of energies, encouraged high hopes. Buoyed up by such considerations, in these years the government sought rapid socialist transformation, pushing for early collectivisation of the Mekong delta and soon attempting a wholesale takeover of southern industry and trade. Despite this impeccable orthodoxy, however, these policies met with extremely poor results, and the economy stagnated. During the late 1970s, economic growth lagged well behind population increases so real living standards fell. While it is true that there was some extremely bad weather, and that the economy suffered from the aid cuts imposed as Vietnam moved closer to the USSR in 1978-9, the basic reason for this disappointing performance was the inability of the economic management system to cope effectively with the resources available to it. This system was essentially that of the DRV.

'The economic system remains an uneasy blend of a still largely unreformed centrally-planned system with a mass of local improvisations'

This weakness was apparent at many levels and familiar to most people who have visited the country. Northern cadres sent to the south could not be relied upon to implement planning directives when tempted in various ways to turn a blind eye; resources actually delivered to the state were often wasted; trade opportunities could not be developed because central bureaucracy wrapped contracts in so much red tape that customers went elsewhere. On top of these deep-rooted problems, which reflected behaviour that was not new, since it stemmed directly from habits learnt in the DRV, the aid cuts of 1978-79 came on top of an effective procurement strike in the south in opposition to the collectivisation drive. This helped precipitate a major economic crisis. The state could neither feed itself, nor secure the resources needed to implement the chosen development programme. As a result the system started to break down, dissolved from below by the efforts of many producers to find ways of acquiring the resources that the state could not supply to them, and so find some way of increasing output.

In 1979-80 the economic crisis allowed such grass roots pressures for greater freedom to push through the rickety constraints of Hanoi's ambitiously centralising system. As resource flows became freer, the economy started to become far more dynamic and efficient, and per capita output began to show positive gains. Output recovered rather quickly. Despite this, however, conservatives soon fought back against the loss of central control, and the reform legislation dating from 1981 shows a clear desire to resist the process of spontaneous decentralisation. To date, no true reform model has appeared, with proper support backed by a clear policy consensus among the top leadership; given their backgrounds and goals, this is not unexpected.

One crucial result of the 1979-80 crisis, however, was that the DRV model lost its hegemony and open debate began to address real problems. At the 1982 and 1986 congresses, the party was deeply self-critical, but failed to arrive at an understanding of the economic reasons for what had gone wrong, starting with the structural problems of the northern economy prior to 1975. The move towards a formalised reform model has been inhibited both by the continuing restrictions upon open debate, and the lack of an effective political process and a clear method for linking policies to overt political groups. There has been no definite outcome to all this, and political conflict continues.

In the absence of a clear reform model, however, life goes on, and the net result has been the creation of a distinctively Vietnamese hybrid that has, on the whole, allowed the economy to operate with a flexibility that – with aid cut off because of the military presence in Cambodia – has gone largely ignored in the West. Many commentators see Vietnam as either a rigidly centralised Soviet satellite, or an over-bureaucratised muddle. Both views are incorrect. The process of spontaneous reform from below and partial accommodation to these pressures from above has helped produce a pattern of inflationary development, where prices are rising rapidly but growth, while possibly slowing in recent months as inflation has accelerated, has at least until recently remained positive in per capita terms. Furthermore, comparison with the rigid orthodoxy promoted immediately after 1975 shows how far things have already come; in collectivised agriculture, state industry, and foreign and domestic trade, important legislation supports decentralised activities. The economy is now far more lively and dynamic than it was. Implementation of even these limited reforms, however, is often resisted by conservatives both at the centre and in certain regions. Subsidised producers and consumers alike see reason to oppose the price changes that must accompany further reforms. The economic system therefore remains an uneasy blend of a still largely unreformed centrally-planned system with a mass of local improvisations oriented towards far more flexible methods that have received legislative support since 1981. As already noted, this support was extremely ambiguous.

So what was really going on in the DRV back in the early 1960s? Putting the now-outdated wartime propaganda to one side, it is clear that during the first five year plan (1961-65) the Soviet model failed. Quite contrary to expectations, it proved impossible to establish effective centralised control over the northern economy, and instead the government found itself increasingly dependent upon foreign aid and inflationary finance. This resulted from a number of factors. The Soviet development model is, in the final analysis, premised upon the attractive idea that under-development means an absolute absence of modern industry. This suggests (falsely) that investment in such sectors is necessarily the correct solution. The model assumes that the familiar Soviet institutions – centrally-planned state industry, collectivised agriculture and widespread state trading monopolies aimed at securing direct control of resource allocation – are capable of extracting resources needed to operate new factories. Food can be taxed or 'procured' out of agriculture to feed the rising non-agricultural labour force. As many peasants know, the model contains a strong element of compulsion; it also typically creates high levels of inefficiency due to its reliance upon a large bureaucracy to allocate resources. Such ideas are quite alien to modern conceptions of the need to stress efficiency and encourage grass roots development, especially of agriculture, in a balanced development programme. But, so long as the resources can be mobilised, the model can create – as in North Korea – rapid industrialisation.

North Vietnam was particularly ill-suited to such policies. As the historical Vietnamese homeland, it has long been an area of population saturation. Since colonial exploitation had left the area almost devoid of development, the agrarian surplus was extremely small. The rural population had centuries of experience in coping with the demands of centralised states, whether neo-confucian or French. This endowed them with a great facility in subverting institutions set up to control them, and a healthy respect for the value of collective action. Such people were well-placed to cope with collectivisation.

During the early years of the first five year plan, as rising non-agricultural employment increased the demand for food, the state's inability to drive peasant consumption down to subsistence levels in the name of socialism became clear. Inflationary finance supported free-market activity, and, as food prices started to rise above state prices, peasants responded by diverting resources into the free market. From then on, producers had a choice: to supply cheaply to the state and fulfil their socialist duty, or to exploit the alternatives offered by other channels such as the free market. The centrally-planned sectors had to compete with such alternatives, and therefore to

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adapt to their presence. Balances were struck; illegality became a necessary part of effective strategies that could get things done.

After 1965, however, the combination of large aid imports and wartime hypernationalism undoubtedly helped prop up central authority. But the northern economy's inability to support the levels of industrial and bureaucratic employment imposed upon it created a chronic import-dependency. Far from becoming a 'strong state', Hanoi instead found itself dangerously aid-dependent, lacking the effective centralised control over the northern economy promised by Soviet and Chinese textbooks. Excessive industrial investment in a poor area had created something close to an industrial enclave, dependent upon current imports and isolated from its natural sources of supply in the domestic economy. Furthermore, this enclave was operated by people who assumed that they should be able to extract needed resources from the rest of the economy through administrative means, which meant at low or negligible cost to themselves. Suppliers, it was thought, had to deliver to the state rather than follow immediate material interests.

Now, for a united Vietnam possessing the large potential rice surpluses of the Mekong in the south, the DRV model seems far more viable than for the impoverished north. Encouraged by this, or perhaps simply following theirlong-standing assumptions, after 1975 the leadership re-asserted the validity of the DRV's system, despite its failure, and sought to impose it upon the entire country. But by the late 1970s, it was already quite clear that Hanoi's administrative apparatus was too weak and ineffective to force through such policies. It could not simultaneously reform the north while extending control to the south. Confronted with the late 1970s economic crisis, the DRV model effectively lost widespread support within the party, and, despite efforts by conservatives, it has not as yet regained it.

The crisis of the late 1970s had a number of different aspects, but was at root to do with the central authorities' inability to control economic resources, and concentrate them upon priority areas – the central state economy, and especially heavy industry. State industry was not producing goods that were meeting people's real demands, and was instead concentrating upon increasing its own activities. This meant, once more, excessive investment, and increased pressure upon suppliers to deliver resources cheaply. Based upon such policies, it is not surprising that the collectivisation drive in the Mekong proved unable to extract enough rice to meet the state's needs, and had to be abandoned temporarily. In the north,

'There has been no clear outcome to all this, and political conflict continues'

minor concessions to peasants at the important sixth plenum of August 1979, held in the middle of the economic crisis and just after the Chinese invasion, were rapidly used by them as a pretext for moves to abandon collective production altogether. When Chinese and Western aid was cut in the run-up to the invasion of Cambodia, state factories facing sharp falls in supplies from the state started to roam the country looking for inputs wherever they could find them.

This so-called 'fence-breaking' was widespread and quite illegal, since it was independent from the central plan system and so broke the state's trade monopoly. The economic crisis therefore saw wide-ranging attempts by the grass roots to abolish the old system of forced delivery of cheap resources to the state that ignored immediate interests, in favour of more voluntary relations that allowed producers and consumers to know and respect the value of the resources involved. Since this raised economic efficiency, it is hardly surprising that it helped take up the massive economic slack created by the bureaucratic supply system and output started to rise quite sharply in many areas. Naturally, however, conservatives viewed these processes with great suspicion.

Out of this period of anarchy and widespread breakdown of the central planning system came important legislation. Initially, this usually legalised things that were going on already, but required them to be registered and controlled. In part, many conservatives saw these as tactical concessions which could later be withdrawn. But since this meant granting freedoms in order to prevent a complete erosion of central control, many commentators greeted the new policies as a clear example of 'reform' and decentralisation, when in fact they were nothing of the kind. The fifth congress of 1982, which saw a recentralising group firmly in control of most key central economic organs, came during a period of three or four years during which the central authorities tried hard to rein in grass roots freedoms. Ho Chi Minh City's trading companies were closed down; state factories which had been busy finding ways of doing independent deals found themselves under pressure from their ministries to supply higher volumes of goods at low prices; peasants found themselves forced to sell to the state through the preserved system of cooperatives, rather than free to sell surplus on the free market as earlier legislation had promised. Crucially, the country did not open up to the West, visas remained hard to get, and ordinary contact with foreigners were still forbidden. The drive to collectivise the Mekong delta restarted, and was declared successful by the end of 1985.

Despite problems and setbacks, the ultimate nature of a reformed Vietnamese economic management system is reasonably clear, and reflected in the direction spontaneous reforms at the grass roots have taken. There is probably a clear consensus among economic management cadres of the need to move in this direction. There is an equally clear consensus that the process of reform is, in economic terms, extremely hard to understand in detail, and so inherently difficult to manage. The key is an effective decentralisation, so that economic relations do not rely upon subsidies and producers and consumers have greater freedoms to search out customers and suppliers, both domestically and abroad. This would pressure the residual elements of large-scale organisation into more effective and efficient methods.

Subsidies for welfare services and other social spending would come from a modern system of taxes paid in money rather than the direct extraction of resources from agriculture or state industry – effectively, a crude form of taxation in kind that has appalling effects upon economic efficiency. There is substantial agreement that it is far better to tax consumption than production, otherwise economic distortions are magnified and inefficiencies grow. The essential problem is that moves in such a direction involve substantial transition costs. Subsidised producers and consumers have to find alternatives, for if they do not they will face real income falls as prices and costs move against them. Managing such a process requires considerable technical and political skill in order to predict likely outcomes and then sell them to the people involved.

The role of the USSR is not clear and, given the increasing importance of reform under Gorbachev, this is not surprising. After 1979 Moscow became the dominant aid donor, and has therefore been in a strong position to influence economic policy. It is likely that the reforms were supported by the USSR, initially as a tactical concession, and on essentially pragmatic grounds. The security aspects of the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship are probably of over-riding importance. But the evident failure of the post-1981 policies in restraining inflation and stabilising the economy, coupled with the slow progress in modernising the Vietnamese leadership itself, must produce considerable tensions. Despite this, however, the current aid programme has doubled to around $2 billion annually. Given the slow progress of economic reform in the USSR itself, it must be difficult for Moscow to advise the Vietnamese to abandon entirely what was – at least until recently – their own development model, despite the fact that that would probably reduce the costs of their assistance programme.

Recentralising policies faced rising opposition even before the death of general secretary Le Duan in 1986. Since the central planning system

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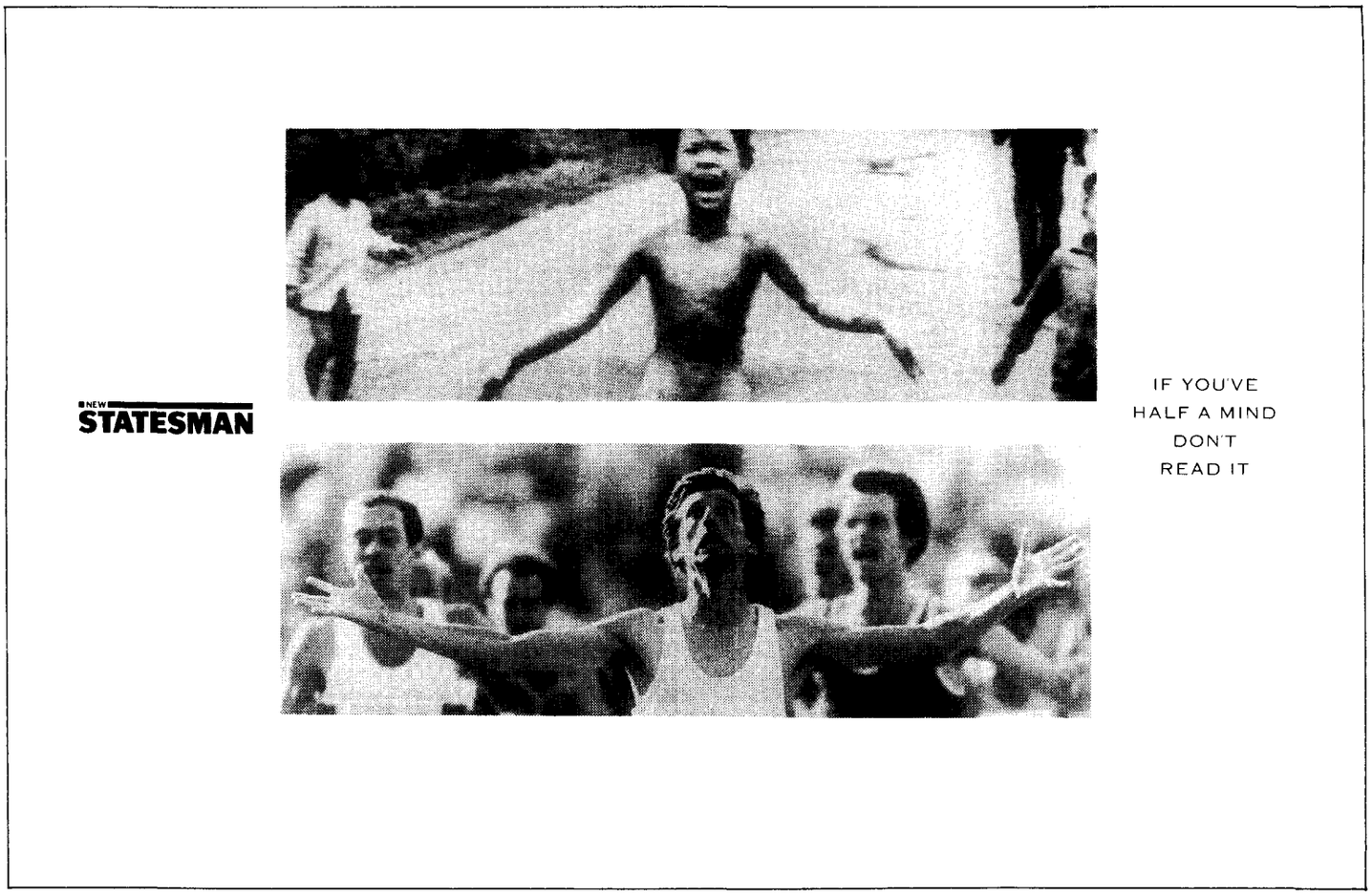
remained in place, but could not secure resources for itself any other way, the government had to have recourse to the printing press. Massive wage hikes for state employees and sharp increases in cash payments to peasants for agricultural supplies were not offset by increased revenues, so inflation has sky-rocketed. In 1978, a worker might have earned 40 old dong a month. Now, before supplements, he or she might get around 500 new dong – 5,000 old dong. On the free market, the dollar was worth around 100 dong in early 1986 – it is now worth nearer 1000. Naturally enough, while fundamental problems remain unsolved such measures cannot defend state employee incomes, so inflation simply transfers resources to those who hold real assets; such steep price rises have increased popular discontent in urban areas, while many local interests have united in resenting attempts by ineffective central bureaucrats to re-impose control. Growth, although positive, has been unstable. In any case, daily experience shows that administrative economic management is inefficient and a major source of waste. If you want to get things done properly it is better to use alternative methods. Furthermore, while there exist rather strong elements within the party that can effectively push for further reforms, the conservatism of many central state economic organs has been far harder to dislodge. It is in any case supported by fears of the loss of power entailed by further reforms. However, the continuing confusion supports *de facto* decentralisation.

'Without political reforms to open up the system, no clear and widely supported development model is likely to gain real and sustainable predominance'

It is rather easy to see glaring gaps in the present policy stance. For instance, there is little support for rural industry based upon individual co-operators. Since the co-operative is still viewed as the correct place for accumulation, there has been no sustained campaign to encourage household-based non-agricultural production in order to absorb some of the under-employed rural labour force. Crucially, there is no effective rural credit scheme. Furthermore, peasants usually have to buy industrial inputs on the free market, since the state channels its own subsidised supplies through the co-operatives for political reasons. Another example is the retention of the direct material supply system in state industry side-by-side with the far more flexible methods of 'own-procurement' and free disposal. Since experience shows that the latter are economically more efficient, the main justification for preserving the former must be the reduction of transition costs, so that, in effect, it slows the necessary process of price adjustments and consequent real income shifts needed by the reform process. But, in practice, there has neither been a clear statement advocating steady progress in this direction, nor official support for the development of methods of managing that process in order to make it as effective as possible.

Despite these unresolved problems, political life remains, at least on the surface, surprisingly calm. One important aspect of the widespread unwillingness to settle political differences violently, combined with the inherent complexity of the problem, is that economic debate is likely to continue. Because of its history, the party has to be able to – and does – contain opinions that range from unreconstructed neo-stalinists to far more liberal elements with equally impeccable revolutionary records. It is, in fact, a rare example of an unpurged independent revolutionary party. Without political reforms to open up the system, no clear and widely supported development model is likely to gain real and sustainable predominance in the near future. The inevitable transition to a reformed and more effective economic management system will therefore probably come about through a continued unplanned change. This means, unfortunately, that there is rather little chance that the process can be managed so as to make it less costly and more effective. Furthermore, if inflation continues to spiral there is an increasing risk of political instability, and the likelihood of the open popular discontent of which the government has, as yet, little experience. ●



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Jarman (left): *The Last of England* is about the sinking of the Titanic, and the Titanic is Britain.

Home Movie Man

Derek Jarman was a painter in the 1960s. He then moved to theatre design and to the cinema. He has made several feature films including *Sebastiane, Jubilee* and *Caravaggio.* Below, he talks to Simon Watney about his work and his new film, *The Last of England,* which is released this month.

How did you get interested and involved in cinema?

I was never interested in the cinema. I am obsessed by it. I actually got involved through Ken Russell in 1970 asking me to design *The Devils*. Even at that time I had no intention of making my own films but *The Devils* took a whole year and disrupted my life – I was a painter and a theatre designer – and during that year I lost heart with my painting. Firstly I made a whole series of home movies.

What do you mean by 'home movies'? It seems that all your films are home movies to some extent.

I think they are because I try to keep everything very close to the concept of home, which is perhaps something which is difficult because I am gay. It is hard to establish 'home' being a gay man. My home movies therefore reported a very different world to that presented by my grandfather and my father. They presented a way through the ceremonies of heterosexual life: marriages and honeymoons.

Do you think your first films received the kind of reception they did precisely because they show a different sort of home life, a different kind of domesticity, to that which is fashionable in British cinema?

Yes, because I never really knew cinema. The cinema that I'd liked very much when I grew up was the Italian cinema of the 60s and the cinema of the American underground. I loved *Carry On* films but they weren't functioning by the time I started in 70s. The 70s were the doldrums for the cinema. After 1974 the older film makers like Ken Russell and Nicholas Roeg had to move to America. There was a vacuum and the vacuum was filled by radical films like *Night Force* or my own *Sebastiane.*

After *Sebastiane* did you find you were a part of the British independent cinema movement?

I have to admit that at this time I knew very little about other independent film makers. The fashion at the time for independent film makers was structuralist films. They found *Sebastiane* very self-indulgent. But I believe we do need a cinema that includes more of what is called self-indulgence and less of theory. We would have a much more vibrant cinema if people actually explored who they were in all their great variety and used that as a yardstick from which to make their films.

***Jubilee* became very closely associated in the public imagination with the origins and history of the British punk movement. How did the 60s and 70s affect you?**

Looking back into the 60s, there was a double thing going on. One of the things that was most important, and it's quite difficult to explain to people now, was the personal action of dancing all the way through the night. Now it's a time when there is no dancing. It might look hedonistic to people outside it, or decadent, but actually to be openly dancing, say, in The Slade, which is after all an art school, was possible.

In 1963 David Hockney was a bench-mark. He did so much to alter our immediate surroundings. It might seem like you are doing a very small thing but it can actually ricochet through the system. And it was a recurring thing: this attempt of generations to rediscover, or discover themselves. They are

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usually young people with very few resources so the only thing they would have to hand would be themselves, hence expression through clothes, make-up and whatever. It might have been very naive yet nevertheless it was genuine when it happened.

How do you see your own work in relation to David Hockney; two figures of the same period going off in different directions but dealing with similar subjects?

It was much more difficult to be a film maker than a painter. As a painter David had the protection of the fine art world. No-one wanted to know about a gay film. If I was an unknown and took the idea of *Caravaggio* to C4 it would get turned down.

So what changes has C4 made do you think?

None. For certain types of film makers it has been wonderful but for other film makers it was disastrous. It was disastrous for me in the early 80s because they turned down *Caravaggio*. The BFI finally funded *Caravaggio* after a five year break. And then I deliberately went into my own wilderness again mostly using Super 8 film because this could not be funded and it doesn't come up to the standards of tv. So it cuts across all the rules and regulations of the film maker of the last 40 years by venturing into dicey political areas.

So how did your new film *The Last of England* come about?

There are, of course, many readings to anything, but the reading I make of the painting *The Last of England* by Ford Madox Brown is of a sort of ship setting out presumably to a bigger ship with a whole lot of people about to leave Great Britain. What you actually see is the best people leaving under compulsion and this is what I feel about a lot of things close to me in the 45 years that I've led my life. Many of the things one thought were the best seemed to be forced out by a mass media culture. In this way I'm a complete exile in my own country.

That's something that our generation of gay men increasingly feels. Does that relate to *The Last of England?*

Yes it does. The atmosphere relates to it very clearly.

So how did the project develop?

I've taken the film back to the home movies. Anything that I pointed my camera at seemed to be important and therefore the boundaries were my own and those of my collaborates. So it's very much a film about 1987. It has no spoken narrative whatsoever, it's done with music and image. The music is extremely complex. We recorded the music of the street (for example, the Royal Wedding in the streets, people making speeches against, people making speeches for and we even recorded bricklaying). The film is the sinking of the Titanic, the Titanic being Great Britain.

You see three things. First of all you see a landscape of the Docklands where the old industries have gone and in place a sort of arid modern suburbia which is being planted there. At the same time we filmed Liverpool from the point of view of a Liverpudlian. I then went to America to film a different type of wasteland. We contrasted it with the footage here all the time so it was all to do with juxtaposition. I also brought in my parents' home movies which delineate a very cut-off world because I was brought up in RAF stations which at that stage were surrounded with barbed-wire. You see that this child is being brought up in the enclave which is the enclave of power. I had a barbed-wire creche.

The second half of the film moves into a very grey area where one sees young people being rounded up, refugees and masked terrorists. The idea being, of course, eventually, that we've discovered the establishment needs terrorists to keep things in place. In other words it would invent the enemy if it didn't have one. It's a very bleak world which has specific references to Pasolini's film *Salo*. You have a huge disco scene in the centre of that, most of which is done to gunfire. It is the motivating thing and has people blotting themselves out with alcohol, and ends in a sort of a 40s sex scene and then execution.

Finally the film ends up at the Docklands with the refugees, which is the moment when it really becomes like *The Last of England*. There is a moment of complete calm and then we go into an area which is more to do with institutions: the royal family, the war, land of hope and glory, the empire, a destitute tramp who is used as a foil to consumer culture, the *American Express* and *Visa* cards. It ends up with the royal marriage and with the baby cradled in copies of *The Sun* from the Falklands crisis which means suicide and war.

The final scene is that of shredding an illusion where Tilda Swinton attempts to cut herself out of the wedding dress, which because it is so well made is extremely difficult, and does a dance simultaneously. I think this is the most extraordinary thing that I've ever filmed. That passes and we have a moment which almost might end in the shades rolling across the dark waters. It's open-ended, and in a sense 'shredding' is also a dance that shreds all illusions. What it does is that once you've experienced those 10 minutes you've almost forgotten what the film was about.

Do we have any institutions of hope in contemporary Britain?

Although the film is open-ended the only optimistic thing about it is the fact that I made it. It's really an extremely pessimistic film.

Do you think your films help us to see the world?

I hope that they do. They certainly enable myself, and the people I've worked with, to do so.

Who did you make *The Last of England* for?

It's for everyone potentially. It is an open-ended film; therefore it doesn't impose a narrative so you're not meant to jump here or climb there or do anything particular. It is for people to scan within those images anything they particularly want to do. I hope that it's an egalitarian film in that sense. ●

First Among Equals

Publishers plan around it, Christmas shopping is simplified by it, list editors' careers can be made on backing the winner and previously little known authors are likely to be granted fairy tale prestige and wealth once it's stamped onto their novel's jacket. Yes, the Booker season is here again. In the promotional glare – bets placed with Ladbroke's, the televised dinner, extensive interviews, the thrill of suspense – the real and regular winner, of course, is Booker. The international food and agriculture business pays out a mere £15,000 prize money plus annual publicity and administrative expenses and in return is guaranteed an hour or so prime-time and sustained attention from the press worldwide.

First sponsored in 1969, and first televised 10 years later, the prize has gradually distinguished itself from the other 200 or so literary prizes through time, hard work and some luck. When John Berger, 1972 winner, criticised Booker McConnell's trading record in the Caribbean and donated half his prize money to the Black Panthers, his attack ironically helped to hoist the event out of its literary ghetto and onto the news pages, where it has remained. When Anthony Burgess lost to William Golding in 1980 and refused to accept defeat like a gentleman, it proved itself a wonderful television spectacle, combining the adrenalin of the race, the glamour of competing personalities and the familiarity of prize-giving day.

The Booker Prize has also succeeded in increasing the readership of serious fiction, although it is impossible to measure by how much. The winning choices can be bemusing and sometimes a bit dull, the absences from the selection incomprehensible (Angela Carter's stunning *Nights at the Circus* was not

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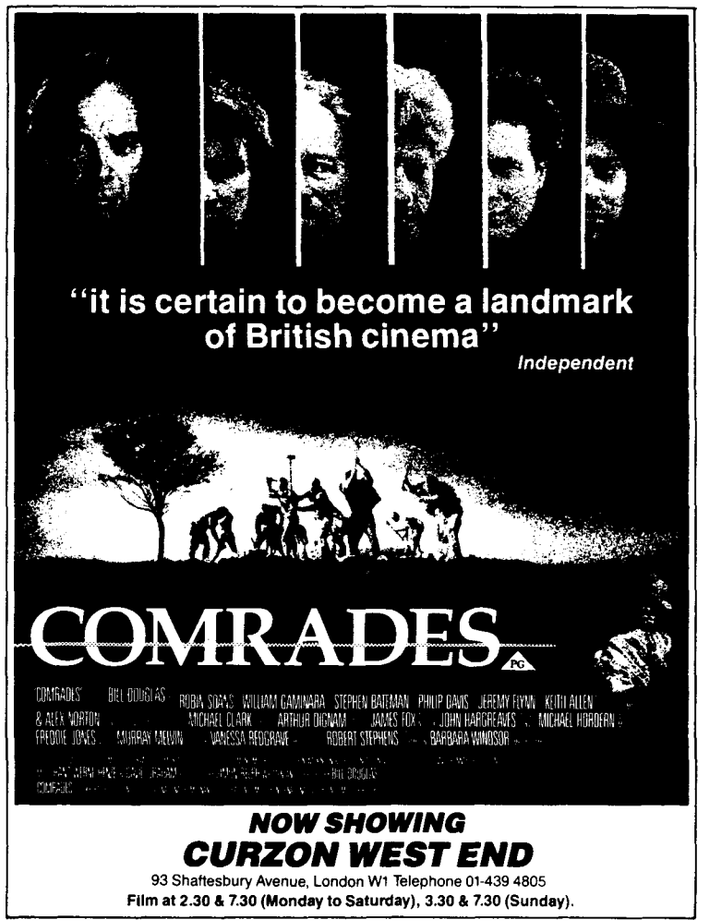
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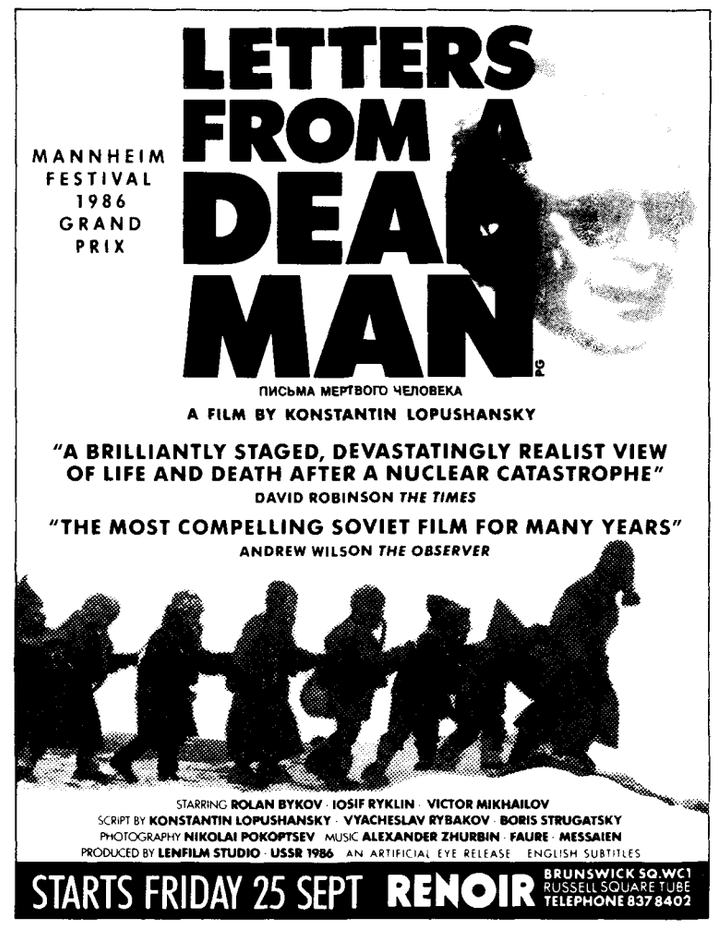
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mentioned in 1984). But the shortlist of six has the valuable, if fiercely unjust, function of giving us a recommended reading list from the tens of thousands of novels produced each year. And the subsequent impact on sales justifies the Booker Prize's position as the pivot of the publishing year; the jewel in the crown for publishers and authors.

Those books considered for the prize are categorised as 'literary' – meaning highbrow, not for mass consumption and therefore not otherwise very profitable. A hypothetical second novel that follows a respectfully reviewed first novel could normally expect a print run of around 4,000 copies. The effect on sales if it then won the Booker Prize would be dramatic. In 1982 Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* had sold just under 4,500 copies on the eve of the award. A year later UK and Commonwealth sales had reached 56,000 in hardback, 35,000 through bookclubs and 250,000 in paperback. In 1983 the surprise winner, JM Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, had sold 2,500 before the announcement of the award; two months later it had sold 42,000 in hardback.

And this is only the beginning. When Anita Brookner won the 1985 Booker Prize with *Hotel du Lac*, she was a respected but shadowy author whose previous novels had not sold more than 5,000 copies each. Since the award Granada paperbacks have had to reprint their three backlist Brookner titles several times over; both Brookner and her novels, previously received with muted admiration, are now the centre of attention on review pages.

Everyone agrees that to have one 'winner' is unfair and arbitrary. But the appeal of the Booker Prize resides precisely in choosing a 'first among equals'. That is borne out by the changing fortunes of the Whitbread Prize. In 1971 there were five prizes going to five category winners: fiction, first novel, biography, children's book and poetry. The winners received little media or public attention. In 1985 Whitbread selected an overall winner from the categories. That, rather than prize money amounting to £25,000, has given it increasing status and glamour. Hardly anyone could name its past category winners. Many, however, could identify Douglas Dunn's *Elegies* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* as the 1985 and 1986 winners.

The sales figures for these two winners emphasise Whitbread's higher profile. Douglas Dunn's collection of poems had a print run in spring 1985 of 5,000; in November Faber reprinted a further 2,500 in response to the rumour that it would win the Whitbread poetry category; following the announcement in December that it had won the overall award they reprinted 7,200 in January 1986 and 4,800 in February.

7,500 sales over two years would have been regarded as highly successful – in fact *Elegies* has so far sold more than 20,000. Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* had a print run in Spring 1986 of 4,000 in hardback. After it was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in September a further 6,500 were reprinted. In November 1,700 more copies were produced pending the Whitbread Awards. As the overall winner, Ishiguro's novel has sold rapidly; 50,000 paperback editions were printed in March 1987 alone.

Similarly, the appeal of the first non-fiction literary prize, to be awarded for the first time in 1988, is not that a record amount of prize money is being offered (£25,000 for the first prize and £1,500 for the runners-up); it is that out of four shortlisted books there will be one winner. The difficulty that the newest award shares with the Whitbread Prize – of comparing unlike with unlike (how do you judge a novel against poetry? a travel book against a book on history?) – is also the appeal. Somebody wins – and as the tv cameras beam in on one jubilant smile and five stiff upper lips we realise that many more lose. Among the losers are all those writers who have been passed by and all those too-busy or too-gullible readers who fall for the myth of 'the best'. ●

Nicci Gerrard

Booker Prize Winners 1969- 1986

1969 PH Newby	Something to Answer For (Faber and Faber)
1970 Bernice Rubens	The Elected Member (Eyre and Spotiswood)
1971 VS Naipaul	In a Free State (Andre Deutsch)
1972 John Berger	G (Weidenfeld and Nicholson)
1973 JG Farrell	The Siege of Krishnapur (Weidenfeld and Nicholson)
1974 Nadime Gordimer Stanley Middleton	The Conservationist (Cape) Holiday (Hutchinson)
1975 Ruth Prawer Jhabvala	Heat and Dust (John Murray)
1976 David Storey	Saville (Cape)
1977 Paul Scott	Staying On (Heinemann)
1978 Iris Murdoch	The Sea, The Sea (Chatto and Windus)
1979 Penelope Fitzgerald	Offshore (Collins)
1980 William Golding	Rites of Passage (Faber and Faber)
1981 Salman Rushdie	Midnight's Children (Cape)
1982 Thomas Keneally	Schindler's Ark (Hodder and Stoughton)
1983 JM Coetzee	Life and Times of Michael K (Secker and Warburg)
1984 Anita Brookner	Hotel du Lac (Cape)
1985 Keri Hulme	The Bone People (Hodder and Stoughton)
1986 Kingsley Amis	The Old Devils (Hutchinson)

The Booker Prize will be announced on October 29. This year the panel of judges is chaired by PD James, who is joined by Selina Hastings (*Daily Telegraph*), Alan Massie (prize-winning novelist), Trevor McDonald (news reporter), and John B Thompson (IBA).

Laurie Sparham/Network

Clubbin': Check the moves

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Cities are more glamorous, more dangerous, by night. It's the time when children and married couples go home; the time when metropolitan ghouls come out to prowl; the time, traditionally, when seduction takes place. The nightclub, an institution revitalised in the last five years or so, participates in this mythology.

There is a lingering association with magic, wickedness, the forbidden. The tendency of the places to deck themselves out as crypts, caves and grottos, or dens – enclosures for animals – contributes to this sense of claustrophobic gloom and fatality. Even the hi-tech glossiness of huge emporiums like the Hippodrome or Heaven take black as their predominant colour scheme – still a reference to darkness and hidden

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depths. Nightclubs are places that, topographically, one steps *down* into in the manner of a grave. It's a step into the unknown.

The 'club' as such denotes a form of exclusivity – however this is achieved. Membership is offered at many places, regardless of whether this is strictly necessary to get you in, or requires any particular qualification. Draconian door policies, selecting people according to the expertise of their decoration is another recent addition that helps differentiate clubs from the more mundane discos. Groups of fashion victims have evolved their own form of keeping a club exclusive. It changes venue every week and venues are passed on only through word of mouth – details aren't published. If you miss a week, you've had it. Their momentum is precious and fragile, like the links in a chain letter. Clubbing now involves a certain dedication.

The 80s is the age in which style has effaced content, and nowhere is this more obvious than on the trail of night clubs. Styles – borrowed from the past, rising to the surface to dissolve instantaneously – come and go, but a few prevailing themes can be noted. The cult of the Goths, for example, so suited to clubbing, seems to be on the wane. In a time when health, and the conjunction of health and sexuality, carries with it real risks, nobody wants to look too unhealthy, even if this is only a sartorial joke. A form of moist innocence is more the vogue: it's round, tanned faces and pale lip gloss, for men as for women, as opposed to chalky faces, extraordinary hair sculpture, and wodges of eye liner. Consciously displayed youth is to the fore. Women, in minis are very anxious to resemble girls; men are eager to show off strong, rippling muscles, fresh from the gym. Beauty is skin deep, but should appear naturally achieved. It is only in gay clubs that one is likely to see a man or woman of substantial years who disports their age with dignity, although moods of proud athleticism persist here as much as anywhere, on the dance floor as much as in the surrounds, in the actual look.

Nightclubs are places one goes to for a thrill, rather than pleasure as such – a notion too languid to accommodate the hectic pace and rapid turnover of clubs for rituals so codified and deliberate. The mood is one of eroticism; it's all in the promise rather than in gratification, liable to take place, if at all, offstage. Strictly speaking, night clubs home in on only two of the senses – sight, with vivid bouncing lights, lasers and sometimes videos, and sound, with loud vibrant music, blotting out conventional lines of communication, leaving little in reserve. Muted endearments are unlikely to be heard, glimpses of others are only caught in prisms of momentary light, in the flesh and in reflections from mirrors. This is all to the good. Most people benefit from being ambiguously lit. It is also a self-conscious play not of courtship, as such, but a flirtation as much with one's own identity. You can become anything or anyone in a nightclub. No one is going to know that the man in rubber is an insurance salesman, or the girl in feathers a typist. The body here is treated like a discrete object: to be dressed up, taken out, given a chance to flex itself on the dance floor. The dressing up is not engaged upon to enchant others so much as mesmerise the self in an orgy of narcissism. The idea is not to melt into another's flesh but burst from one's own in a new configuration: the caterpillar emerges as a butterfly.

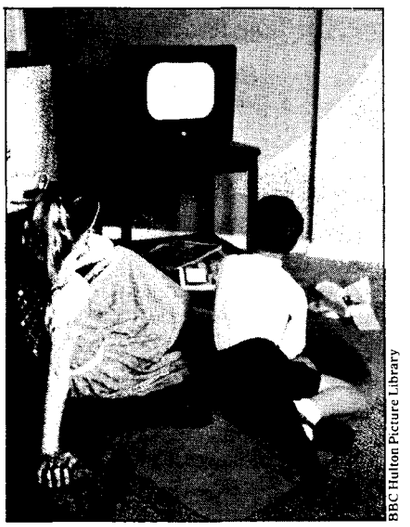
The superficiality of the whole scheme – alluring as this might be – is reflected in the kind of food available at clubs – satay, drumsticks, sushi, nuts, crudités, little snacks: pretty, greedily devoured, but no substitute for real nourishment. The Limelight even used to have machines dispensing knick-knacks – chewing gum, sweets, perfumy things. Little bits of treasure to add to the fun.

One has to have a notion of work to have a well grounded notion of play. Play does not take place in an asocial space, but is securely yoked to it as an adjunct. Clothes and hair-dos, after all, cost money, even before the actual outing, often costly, is embarked upon. It is probably not surprising that as the work ethos becomes more severe, our habits of play are more tautly consecrated. The expense of the nightclubs keeps away the poor, and their current popularity probably accounts for the demise of the scruffy dive, which is a pity.

Nightclubs, however, are not cruel or cold places. While most people tend to visit in small groups, there is nothing to stop people going alone. The whole business of who-is-who is highly tenuous anyway. No-one's to know, and no-one's conspicuous in their aloneness. Like cities themselves, nightclubs are too crowded to couch such distinctions. Even in the most fashion-conscious places, people eye each other up with genuine curiosity rather than critical disdain. The fashion world is not necessarily censorious, but experimental and interested. Only when money is too much at stake, in the Cafe de Paris for example, or Stringfellows, do clothes appear to wear people; the mingling becomes shrill, the posing unbearably rigid.

Gay clubs, on the whole, tend to radiate the most warmth. Unsurprising, as they are grounded in social reality and a pre-emptive sense of social exclusion. Theatricality is manifested with more spirit and wit among a group who historically have found themselves obliged to adopt masks. As opposed to straight nightclubs' often blank air of affirmation, in gay clubs the tone is often one of celebration – occasionally euphoric. In the rush of identification and good humoured solidarity, thrills threaten to spawn into pleasure, and acquaintances and encounters bloom into friendships, however transient. ●

Chris Savage King



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Hard tv times

Matters Of Taste

Since the Peacock Report on broadcasting came down against the introduction of advertisements on BBC TV, the Thatcher government's next push is towards the privatisation of Channel 4. This issue, and the underlying one of public versus free market broadcasting, was one theme of last month's Edinburgh International Television Festival. The EITF is the tv industry's yearly get together, where careers and contracts are made and broken, and where the industry talks to itself about what's going on. So it is a good barometer of current preoccupations within broadcasting, and, more interestingly, gives insight into the internal state of politics and power within the industry.

The festival's title was 'Television Fights Back', against what the organisers saw as a sustained and motivated barrage of criticisms and slurs by the Tory press, and against political interference. But rather than a tv industry defiantly united against common foes, the festival revealed a community quiescent and defensive in the face of external critics, although more combative about conflicts within.

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CHANNEL 5

The Right, represented at the festival by three newspaper editors, three Tory politicians and a token advertising executive, all pitched the same ball: the need for a free market in tv which would lead to more channels, greater diversity of programmes and more consumer choice. These changes would weaken the elitist and closed tv establishment, they argued, and make it more responsive to criticism.

The Right had sympathisers within. Michael Grade, BBC TV's controller of programmes, put his case for privatising Channel 4: it would create competition for advertising sales between the independent tv companies and hold down the rapid rise in advertising revenue. This, Grade concluded, would benefit the BBC, whose revenues – based on a licence fee pegged to the retail price index – couldn't hope to keep up with those of the ITV sector. A wag from the audience commented: 'Great! Sell off Channel 4 because it's good for the BBC!'; and many other voices within the industry, including senior ITV management such as Jeremy Isaacs, about to leave Channel 4, and Paul Fox, of Yorkshire TV, were solidly opposed to privatisation. Naomi Sargant of Channel 4 eloquently smashed the myth that markets meet all social needs, and described the speedy and voracious concentration of ownership that has followed deregulation in Italy and France. Veteran broadcaster and ex-Labour MP Phillip Whitehead, put the forceful view that real diversity, serving minority cultural and social needs, is a delicate achievement that requires regulation against the ravages of concentration.

It is clear that the regulation/free market clash is also a struggle over the meaning of 'choice', 'diversity', 'pluralism', 'independence', and even 'needs'. In the post-modern ideological present these words, and the images of choice, difference and freedom that they convey, are used and abused across the political spectrum. Thus it is not the terms but what lies beneath them that must be scrutinised. For example, the concept of 'independence' is central to the new campaign group 'Channel 4: Not For Sale'. The group, set up by independent producers and journalists who have worked with Channel 4, focuses its campaign around the key assertion that: 'The most recent sense of independence is one that is oppositional or critical'.

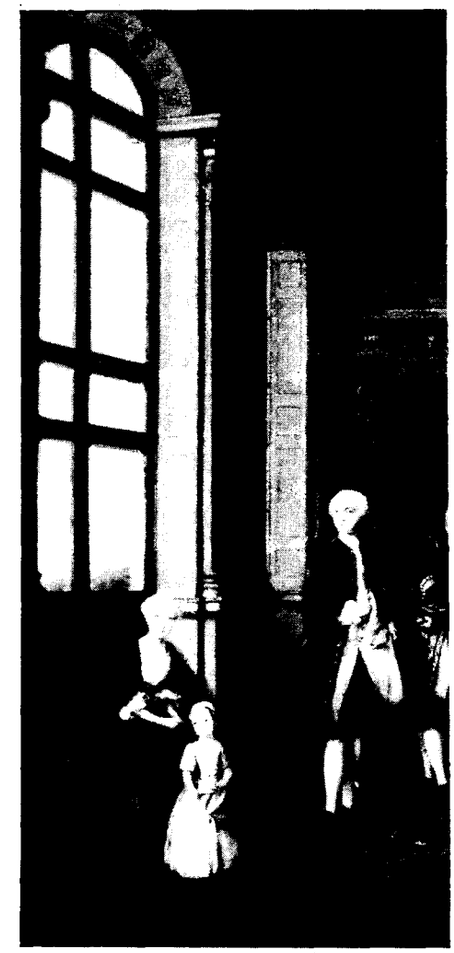
But it's notable that their definition represses other complex realities of independent tv production: that it is a petit-capitalist commercial sector containing companies with varied political and cultural aims; that the Right has no quarrel with a competitive commercial independent sector, and has also championed this sense of 'independence'; and that Channel 4's relations with its non-commercial popular production outfits are far from smooth, as the case of Ceddo film and video workshop shows.

For many left producers, then, and those serving minority interests, the rubric of independent production has been a strategic one involving an ad hoc alliance with elements of the free-market Right. In the struggle to retain Channel 4's current form, 'independence' takes a more progressive political character; but we should be wary of the latitude of the concept and of the collusive nature of tactical positions.

The session on Ceddo workshop's programme, *The People's Account*, came low on the festival agenda. Ceddo are in dispute with Channel 4 and the IBA, who have three times pulled their programme off screen. The programme is an account, from the black perspective, of the Broadwater Farm and Handsworth riots, and of their incitement by the police shootings of Cherry Groce and Cynthia Jarret. It is a damning and passionate portrait of institutionalised racism within the police force and the widespread intimidation and harassment of the black community that follows from that. It is also a rough and messy film. The IBA and Channel 4 say that the film is too one-sided. Their conditions for showing it would be to cut some of the provocative language, and present a 'balancing' audience discussion programme under the IBA's control to be shown with the film. Ceddo do not agree to these conditions, and argue that Channel 4 commissioned the programme to do exactly what it does: answer decades of broadcasting from the dominant white perspective.

It would be easy to criticise the film on the grounds of poor production values. And the strangest thing about the Ceddo affair is why the IBA have not chosen to hang their rejection of the film on such a formal critique. This raises a perplexing question: has the time come when it's preferable and easier for the broadcasting authorities to censor a programme because of arguments of political bias than because of the aesthetic quality of the production? This would be an ironic reversal of the usual rhetoric, in which enshrined production values have stood as a tacit defence against radical and popular programme making. Maybe Ceddo should be told that the film needs work. Maybe it's a positive development that the dominant direction of political bias is nakedly revealed. And maybe that's a marker of increased political honesty by those in power. But of all the festival sessions, Ceddo's alone was unattended by top management from Channel 4.

The interface of tv production aesthetics and politics underlay two other festival debates, on the state of drama and current affairs. The drama debate, inspired by the playwright Ian Curteis whose play on the Falklands was cancelled by the BBC, took up his contention that there is too much left wing tv drama. The opposition argued that, if anything, left wing writers have trouble getting work on tv; and that good drama must convey a complex engagement between two views, two 'rights' as Farrukh Dhondy of Channel 4 put it. From this a surprising agreement emerged, baldly articulated by Curteis' seconder Bruce Anderson, assistant editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*. Anderson spoke of the essential autonomy of art and its transcendence of simplistic political issues. And on this question of a transcendant imaginative truth there was apparently no dissent. In the debate 'Current Affairs on Trial' the mock 'prosecution' argued in opposition to mainstream current affairs that their programmes were boring, elitist and without popular appeal. But at one point the 'prosecuting counsel',



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Helena Kennedy, exempted two programmes – *Newsnight* and *Channel 4 News* – that, she said, were generally held to be of high quality and beyond criticism. Another consensus.

Both debates, then, were disturbing in revealing complacent consensus, that went completely unchallenged, around enshrined production aesthetics. No question for Anderson of the historical specificity of the ideology of autonomous art, which has been subject to intense critique throughout this century. No discussion, either, of the declining acuity of *Newsnight*'s reporting or its lack of tough, interrogative, interviewing. Even by the 'prosecuting' opposition, it seems, *Newsnight*'s role as BBC flagship must not be undermined since ultimately it stands as a sacred symbol of intellectual integrity for the dominant culture of tv production as a whole.

Although galling, we can breathe a sigh at this return to the normal rhetorical order of things. Judgements of production values, of pure form – in other words elusive judgements of taste – continue to be used, to subsume and smother the more mundane and thorny issues of political and critical content. ●

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There are three basic tendencies within the Labour Party today. The first is that of the leadership group with its 'modern', Wilson-style reformism. It draws the line at socialism in its urge to gain office on the terms offered by the existing order. The leader himself is outnumbered within this group only by those against his commitment to independent nuclear disarmament. Having marginalised the SDP, the leadership group may or may not seek to usurp the alliance with the Liberals, although on more conservative terms. Either way, it has a definite prospect of office but little hope of power.

The two other tendencies are represented by the chief authors of these books. Blunkett and Livingstone have a lot in common. Indeed, neither have a chance over the next 15 to 20 years (the likely time-span for their approaches to make a real impact) unless they are *in alliance with the other*. Nonetheless, their current difference in perspective is important, not as a matter of immediate tactics but for the Left's strategy after Thatcher.

There are at least three elements to any such strategy.

First, a programmatic aim that expresses the kind of changes you would like to see and regard as plausible. There does not seem to be a huge difference between Blunkett's and Livingstone's stated aims: both in particular stress the need for democratisation and popular initiatives.

Second, an assessment of the forces and people whose support can be won for such change. There is a difference of emphasis here; Blunkett, from a predominantly white industrial town, is more traditional than Livingstone, the cosmopolitan Londoner, influenced by its vast female workforce. Both, however, seek a wide alliance of support, so this difference is not fundamental.

Third, an assessment of the nature and character of the enemy. It is on this issue that one can see the sharpest contrast in the analysis and approach of the two leading figures to have emerged from the new municipal socialism.

Livingstone's is an unusual bid for the transformation of the Labour Party under his leadership. He starts with the way his analysis of 1968 led him, by the end of that year, into the Labour Party when the rest of the Left was leaving it in droves. In this way he simultaneously demonstrates his singular foresight and claims the mantle and charisma of the 60s as his own. He then recounts his rise through Labour politics in London to the end of the GLC. Sometimes he is frank, sometimes self-serving, but it seems to me that what he is really doing is showing a new generation how to go about being a democratic Labour activist: how to be truthful yet flexible; how to make alliances and to be relaxed about one's views; how to be openly passionate for power, *and to do something with it*; and to remember that the personal is also political, and to respect others as humans different from oneself. In short, both sufficiently detailed and attractively written, **If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It** may become an influential if informal training manual.

Democracy in Crisis is more impersonal. It sets out 'to look at the overall ideological conflict between central and local government and at the implications of this for British politics and society . . .' It is thus a general sociological and political discussion of Britain's postwar history (although it naturally draws upon the Sheffield example) as well as a passionate political argument for intensified local government.

Because it presents a general case, a comparison of the two approaches best starts with Blunkett and Jackson. They take a fundamentally Whig view of British history, long influential among the more civilised of Labour supporters. Their book opens with these stirring words: 'There is a crisis at the heart of British democracy. Freedom and the right to dissent have been curtailed. This arises from the fact that it is in the interests of international capital to turn as many human activities as possible into a commodity which can be bought and sold.'

The presumption here is clear enough. First, Britain is taken to be already democratic. Thus in chapter two the authors argue that: 'During the last 200 years the practice of democracy in Britain has been extended on many fronts . . .' Furthermore, local government has been a key instrument in the development of the democratic order. But now, what do we find? A foreign capitalist conspiracy is undermining this national process (despite the fact that the UK is the world's oldest state of 'international capital'). Since 1979 Mrs Thatcher has introduced 'a market-based approach' (chapter nine). And in order to prevent local government from frustrating her plans she has been willing to 'even *flout the constitution*' (chapter eight).

Actually, we have no written constitution: there is no law above the majority of the houses of parliament, whose second chamber is dominated by hereditary peers. It was these unelected dictators from the shires who ensured that democracy was abolished in the towns.

There is therefore something fundamentally ill-considered in the Blunkett and Jackson approach. They seem to argue that Britain was basically doing fine until Mrs Thatcher came along. There are good reasons to doubt such a perspective.

The best way to understand this with respect to local government is to grasp what might be termed 'The Punjab Factor'. It is something that I tried to describe at the time the Labour municipalities were abolished and which has been best analysed to my knowledge by Jim Bulpitt.

Britain has long been governed by a financially well-heeled clubland or oligarchy deeply imbued with an imperial perspective. In the 19th century, as the home base became more difficult to manage, forms of local government for the cities were contrived. While the centre concerned itself with 'high' politics, the localities were allowed to concentrate on 'low' politics. A system of 'indirect rule' was tolerated, in which local-yokels governed the cities within terms established by the ruling order, whose manners they mimicked, sometimes to the point of absurdity.

The whole population of the British Isles was, and still is, regarded by the Oxbridge elite as so many 'Punjabs'. They may be allowed their local Maharajahs for convenience, but any that get uppity will have their powers strictly limited or, especially if they address larger issues, be abolished for impertinence. Whether it is south London, south Wales, the Isle of Wight or Scotland, each area is a native problem – so many Punjabs to be 'dealt with' from above. Of course the existence of well organised town councils is a *democratic improvement for* the inhabitants, but the idea that such local power might be fundamentally answerable to those below rather than to those above is absurd – such a view fails to comprehend the true nature of Britain's unwritten constitution.

Proof of this, if you like, is provided by Ulster. An integral part of a sovereign country, argued the nationalist Enoch Powell. Mrs Thatcher knew better. If you have a border problem in a troublesome province, of course you seek an agreement with the contiguous state; that is how empires are run. Not much of an empire, you might say, so small and moth-eaten around the edges. But that is beside

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the point. The crucial factor that concerns us is how to describe the ruling power, which was so determined to frustrate the likes of David Blunkett.

Livingstone is far more lucid both about the reactionary character of the social order and the Labour Party's collaboration with it. ('Britain is the most hierarchical, elitist, secretive and class-ridden of the Western industrial democracies.') His politics are democratic in style as well as in word. The GLC was different not just because it was aware of the arrogant, masculine supremacism of Westminster and Whitehall. South of the river funds were open to talent, Livingstone refused to check the colour of people's party card – or indeed to ask if they had one at all. His approach, for all its canny city-slicking, was genuinely enabling and anti-bureaucratic.

It was this that laid the basis for its novel popularity. Prior to the famous advertising campaign against abolition, the Left (including Livingstone) wanted to emphasise policies and campaign around services. Their opinion polls showed, however, that the main concern of Londoners was 'the loss of democratic rights'. The GLC's capacity to respond to this – to the reality of people's wishes and ideas rather than received wisdom, whether of civil servants or marxist tomes – allowed it to break away from 'labourism'.

It is interesting to note that the faultless professionalism of Kinnock's general election campaign, which drew upon the GLC experience, and its failure to deliver similar support shows that the GLC's popularity was due not to its advertising campaign alone, as some claimed, but to its advertising a combative approach that convinced.

But to return to the important difference of perspective that the Left will have to confront in the coming years. One can see the tension reflected everywhere. In the pages of *Marxism Today*, for example, Eric Hobsbawm has argued, like Blunkett, that the threat of Thatcherism is a dramatic form of intense reaction against a fundamentally progressive national-labour tradition which it is essential to protect. Stuart Hall, on the other hand, does not see Thatcher as a response to the success of Labour but rather as a reaction to its failure – her monetarism emanating from the 'decomposition' of labourism itself. His perspective seems closer to Livingstone's therefore.

Obviously Thatcher's assault upon 'consensus politics' and her dispersal of the grandees marks a shift to the Right within the Tory Party. But what the prime minister has done is to gather unto herself the undemocratic powers of rule from above (previously held in common by clubland).

Both Blunkett and Livingstone want to see more rule from below. This is a precondition for the most mild of socialist programmes. As Livingstone puts it in his concluding paragraph, it is the task of the new generation to strengthen 'socialism's weakest flank by intertwining socialism and democracy so that the two become inseparable'. But if the Left sets about this by appealing to the myth of an existing democratic order, it will paradoxically underestimate the origins and strength of Thatcher and the Tory Right, underplay its own appeal, and fail to convince the public. It is essential to be clear about the character of 'the enemy'. The Right is not just a matter of people and policies or even public school boys, its most effective force is the very structure of the British state – its style and mode of operation.

Today, Blunkett and Livingstone find themselves in the heart of that which they are pitted against: the so-called 'Mother of Democracy'. In fact parliament is a cathedral whose every service celebrates rule from above. Their first and perhaps decisive test is whether or not they will be incorporated into its religion. ●

Anthony Barnett

Media Apartheid

Out Of Focus: Writings on Women and the Media
Edited by Kath Davies, Julienne Dickey, Teresa Stratford
Women's Press £5.95 pbk.

After 14 years spent working as a journalist on the *Birmingham Post*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, I am well aware that 'the media' do not treat women fairly, or reflect their interests adequately. But I also know that the label 'media' covers a huge and diverse field – advertising, newspapers, magazines, television, all moving at their own rate of change.

I approached this compendium of uneven writing and research with sympathy and interest. It is valuable, I reasoned, because only two of the 20 or so contributors have worked (or work) within the sector. So the views expressed are from the receiving end. 'Women feel increasingly angry about media sexism because it fails to portray accurately the reality of our lives or to articulate our demands and our experience. We find much of the representation of women highly offensive' write the editors.

And yet I found the book difficult to read and use. One problem lies in the editing. It is too passive. The sources, origins and dates of writing should be more clearly spelt out. The book also belongs to a curious half-way house stage. It is trying to reach out beyond the too-narrow confines of the women's movement to effect change. But the chapter contents, and the agenda for a debate which sparks wider interest and mobilises public support, has not been fully thought out.

I would have welcomed contributions more specifically pinned to sectors. The media is not a seamless robe, but a series of interlocking publications and programmes geared towards specific groups. The editors urge the readers to 'know the enemy'; from the tone of some of the contributors, it seems to me that not all of them do.

In an article on media apartheid, Chinyela Onwurah points to the chasm between *Spare Rib* and *Cosmopolitan*. 'What is needed is a magazine that caters for all women, not for a privileged majority or politicised minority' she argues. Absolutely. But nowhere is the theme developed of what it should contain, how it should be presented.

The Page Three issue is semi-explored: how much more interesting it would have been to read feedback on the way the tabloids are seen to treat and represent women throughout their pages. Indeed, one of the contributions I found most interesting was on the issue of ageism which bore the imprint of much hard discussion and observation. There is an increase in attention given to older women on radio and tv.

The book ends with a chapter about what to do next. I share the editors' note of cautious optimism (though I find their dismissal of *The Guardian*'s unofficial women's page as ghettoism silly: surely it is better to have your own territory as a bridgehead in a national daily newspaper than trust to the editing process?). Feminist pressure has affected the portrayal of women and violence. It has changed the coverage of rape cases. Some traditional women's magazines do address work, social and political issues (though new magazines such as *Prima* and *Best* seem to want a return to the safe domestic values of the 1950s).

To affect the mainstream media I concluded, after reading this book, women have to adopt a cool, insistent, but reasonable voice. They must be seen and heard to have a point which can strike chords with the wider public. Editors and proprietors cannot go on ignoring that. ●

Maggie Brown

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Happy End

The Hearts and Lives of Men
Fay Weldon
Heinemann £9.95 hbk

Fay Weldon's new novel, **The Hearts and Lives of Men** was written at a rate of 800 words a week as a serial for *Woman* magazine. It was a unique project for both. Modern magazine serials are heavily edited, more or less expurgated serialisations of novels – re-writes of Jane Eyre alternating with something slightly more modern, but not much. The instalment by instalment method employed by Dickens and an army of starving hacks has long ago fallen into disuse.

In undoubted tribute to that most celebrated meeter of the weekly deadline, Weldon has called her heroine Little Nell and, as the genre demands, she has subjected her to a series of disasters, strokes of luck, reverses and coincidences which, while providing a satisfying excess of cliffhangers, are the normal lot of most Weldon heroines.

Weldon is, by nature, a pacey writer, carrying the reader along at a gallop as much by the unpredictable eventfulness of the action as by the seductive clarity of her prose. Not for her those obscure and introspective, minutely and coldly observed post-modern exercises in sterility and inaction. A lot happens in a Weldon novel. Birth, death, passion, disillusion, freakish disasters, desperate rescues, the corruption of innocence and the reform of the corrupt.

Cast, on the strength of her early novels, as a heroine of the women's movement, Weldon was never happy in the role. She had no didactic purpose but merely observed the human condition, intervening and commenting on the action and the motives of her characters, it is true, in brisk but sympathetic asides addressed directly to the reader. Her early novels spoke so tellingly to women and sent many off to explore new avenues of feminist thought simply because, being a woman who had grown up in an all-female household, women were what she knew about.

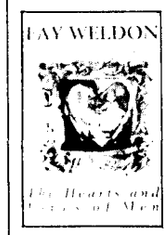
The mature Weldon knows as much about men. In **The Hearts and Lives of Men,** Clifford, her anti-hero, egoist and bounder, is as well explained, as weak, as strong, as silly, brave, good and fatally flawed as her heroine, Helen.

They are wilful, selfish, greedily destructive children of the tawdry 60s. They fall in love, conceive Little Nell, marry and part and, in the bitter aftermath and because Nell is a weapon both can use, they lose her. Many, many events and episodes later, Weldon permits them to find her again but only as a reward for reform, growth and redemption.

It is a moral tale and although sympathy is granted the villains – Weldon is so understanding of the circumstances which can render the stupid evil and the clever foolish – they are ultimately punished. The real world does not wag quite that way but it should, reader, shouldn't it?

But one must not carp given that, however flawed a place it is, it contains guides and entertainers like Fay Weldon and proper, satisfying happy endings. ●

Brenda Polan



Double Depression

Beyond the Rhetoric: Politics, the Economy and Social Policy in Northern Ireland
Edited by Paul Teague
Lawrence & Wishart,
£6.95 pbk.

Left wing texts on Northern Ireland nowadays unfortunately fall largely into two diverging streams: fairly ephemeral, mobilising material, usually produced by the British Left; and more academic, less prescriptively certain work, usually emanating from the north of Ireland. Paul Teague's collection falls firmly into the second category.

That will frustrate the British reader looking for 'the solution' or for endorsement of a preconceived Republican solidarity.

The book has two particular attractions. Firstly, it represents the first considered analysis of politics in the wake of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, though it's a pity some of the chapters haven't been updated. For example, Fianna Fail, in government, no longer opposes the Agreement; the Flag's and Emblems Act *has* been repealed; the supergrass system *has*, to all intents, come to and end; and so on.

So what was the Agreement, on reflection, about? Brendan O'Leary analyses the conventional 'anti-imperialist' Left response – which views the accord as tying the south and the SDLP closer into a grand colonial design – finding its conception of British objectives implausible, its understanding of the evolution of the southern state deficient, and its reading of Unionist reaction sectarian. He finds the known positions of the key institutions involved, the Northern Ireland Office and the Foreign Office – with their respective commitments to broadly-based devolution and good relations with the Republic – adequate explanations.

O'Leary recommends a policy of devolutionist accommodation for the Left, urging the abandonment of Labour's non-sequitur 'unity by consent' policy (as well as the less consensual alternatives advocated by the 'hard' Left).

Whether any sort of devolution will come from the Agreement, however, is a moot point. O'Leary sees it as eventually shocking the Unionists into a less intransigent position – and there is some support for this from the recent publication of the accommodationist 'Task Force' report by key Unionist subalterns. But Paul Bew and Henry Patterson see devolution as even further off the agenda because of the Agreement's polarising effect. On that, for the moment, the jury stays out.

The second strength of **Beyond the Rhetoric** is the unusual attention it gives to the dire state of the province's economy – an issue normally addressed only in terms of the relative distributive positions of the Protestant and Catholic sections of the working class, crucial though that is.

Unemployment doubled between 1970 and 1979, and doubled again in Thatcherism's first three years – and this despite the vast employment (for Protestants) offered by the security industry. But for the relative largesse of the Labour years it would have been even worse, with many jobs created in the service sector to offset the exodus of multinational branch plants on which earlier 'prosperity' had been based. Yet that left an economy in which public spending makes up 70% of GDP – as against 44% in Great Britain. Only half of that expenditure is financed by locally raised tax revenue, leaving a Westminster subvention now running at more than £1,000 a head. While consumption for the core employed thus remains buoyant – as testified by recent retail development around Belfast – there is a vast penumbra of the low-paid and those dependent on one or other benefit.

Bob Rowthorn calls it a 'workhouse economy' where most are employed servicing or controlling the rest, where little is produced for sale to the outside world, and where there is massive dependence on external subsidy. And it is doubly depressing, because, despite the growth of the service sector and the loss of mainly Protestant jobs through de-industrialisation, the sectarian imbalance in job opportunities remains largely unchanged. Catholics are still more than twice as likely as Protestants to be unemployed. Some remain more unequally miserable than others. ●

Robin Wilson

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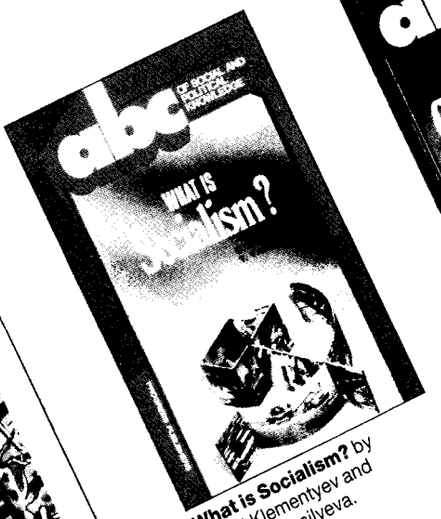
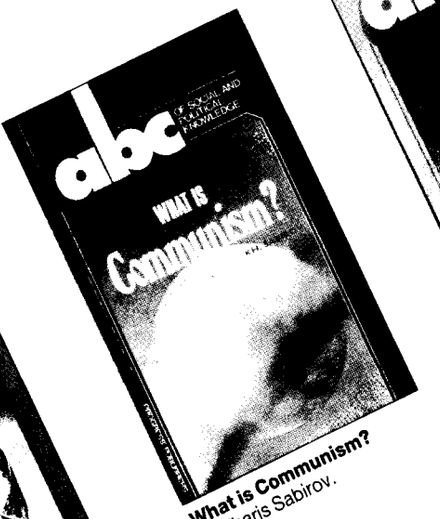
abc of Social and Political Knowledge. £1.95

Thinking politics: what's in a concept?

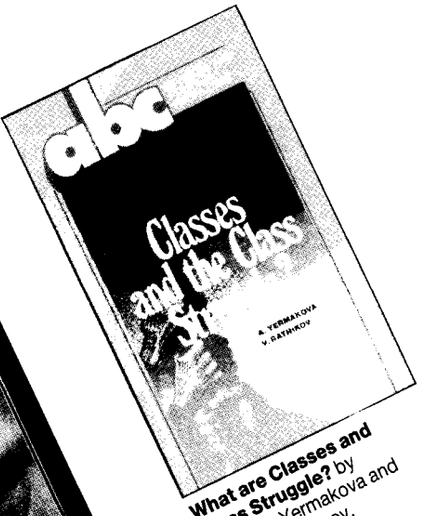
What is Labour? by Paul Savchenko.



What is Socialism? by Dmitri Klementyev and Tamara Vassilyeva.



What is Communism? by Kharis Sabirov.



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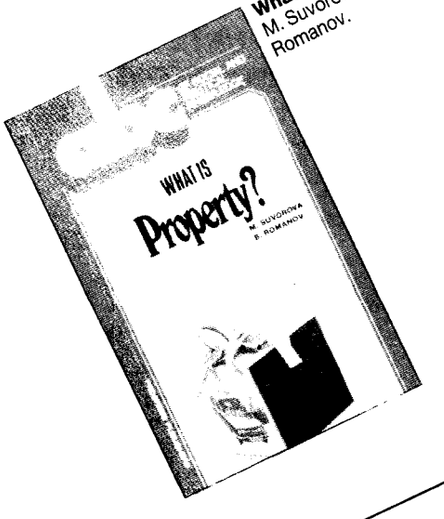
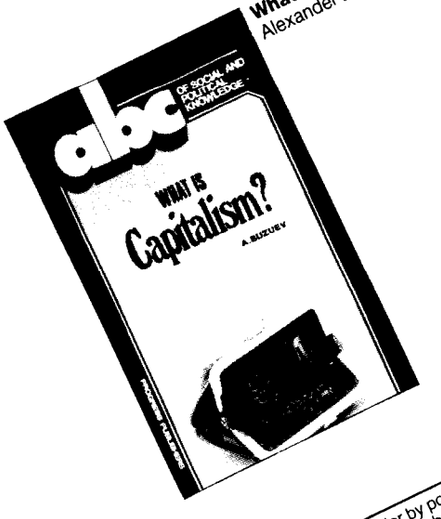
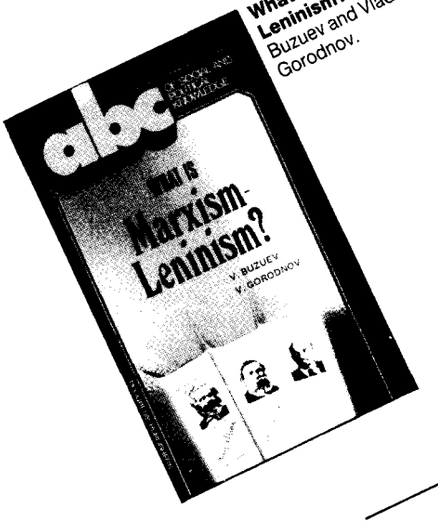


What is Property? by M. Suvorova and B. Romanov.



What is Capitalism? by Alexander Buzuev.



What is Marxism-Leninism? by Vladimir Buzuev and Vladimir Gorodnov.

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CENTRAL BOOKS

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'Labour left unity' has been the subject of much recent debate in the national press. Here Peter Hain and Martin Jacques continue the discussion.

Soft-Left Sectarians

With the labour movement virtually shut down for the summer holidays, *Tribune* published in mid-August a statement on left unity. Signed by four prominent executive members of the 'soft-Left' Labour Co-ordinating Committee (George Galloway MP, Peter Hain, Ken Livingstone MP and Joan Ruddock MP) and the three officers of the 'hard-Left' Labour Left Liaison, it was pretty unexceptional.

Pre-emptively leaked in a slanted *Guardian* report as an attack on Neil Kinnock (which it wasn't), presented as a personal Ken Livingstone manoeuvre (which it wasn't) and interpreted as some major ideological statement on the Left's future (which it wasn't), the statement generated rather more excitement than this signatory at least expected.

Why? Perhaps because it brought out into the open some dilemmas and disagreements in Labour's so-called 'soft Left'.

The statement pointed out that, in rejecting a joint slate with the Campaign group for the July shadow cabinet elections, the Tribune group seemed to prefer an alliance with the centre Right rather than the rest of the Left. It argued that this position could evolve towards a pact with the Alliance, as advocated by the *New Statesman* and leading Fabians. And it listed 15 points of common ground to campaign upon.

The deep divisions in Labour's Left since Tony Benn's bid for the deputy leadership in 1981 have been about matters of substance, and none of the signatories would deny that big differences remain.

However, many in the soft Left have become battle-hardened by encounters with the hard Left. Angry at posturing in the London Labour scene, bruised by intimidation from *Militant* and the ultra Left, tired of the empty oppositionalism and gesture politics, they are hostile *in principle* to any 'left unity' moves.

Thus, in voting not to support the statement, the majority of the LCC Executive did not dissent from the 15 points, but rather the context in which they appeared. As with the Tribune Group majority which rejected the joint left slate, the attitude is: 'We can go it alone and the best of the rest of the Left will come over to us in due course'.

This is sometimes associated with a sectarianism more typical of hard-left groups. It fails to recognise that groups like Labour Left Liaison and the Campaign Group are not monolithic – indeed that they include people who accept that the Left has made mistakes and that socialism needs re-thinking and renewing.

It allows soft-left politics to be defined by opposition to the ultra Left rather than anything positive of its own – leaving a void through which many slip by default into positions almost indistinguishable from the new centre-right politics developing in the party. And it overestimates the strength of the soft Left and its ability to deliver the goods.

The LCC and Tribune are also caught between the roles of pressure groups and taking responsibility for running the party (both have members in key organisational and political positions up and down the country). They are often not helped by Neil Kinnock's unwillingness to be benignly tolerant of those who support his leadership while disagreeing with him at times. The danger is that the soft Left will end up being the new establishment in the party *without a strong and organised base necessary to carry through its project.*

In any case, it is arrogant simply to write off a whole section of the Left which has significant (albeit falling) support among constituency and union activists, which contains some of the most energetic workers in extra-parliamentary campaigns, and with which some of the brightest of the young MPs still associate (Clare Short, Joan Ruddock, Paul Boateng and George Galloway have joined the Campaign Group for example).

The whole picture is complicated by the fact that Labour left politics can be pretty primitive: with tactics elevated into principles, single issue totem poles substituted for ideological analysis, and personality put before policy.

The truth is that there is much common ground between hard and soft Lefts when policy is actually discussed. One of the frustrations is that the Labour Left has evacuated itself from economic debate – a strange position for socialists – preferring to take refuge in half-hearted slogans about nationalisation and internal party struggles. (It should be recalled that the Left's strength and authority in the 1970s derived in part from the fact that it had a credible alternative economic strategy).

One concern of the LCC signatories is to engage in dialogue and face the whole of Labour's Left with the need to take policy making seriously again. That cannot be done from a sectarian vantage point.

In case this may appear merely an in-house matter, there are bigger issues at stake. The soft Left has basically two choices. It can regroup, embrace others now outside its ranks who are also prepared to build a genuinely *democratic* Left, and move forward to modernise the labour movement and renew its socialist appeal. Or it can look in the other direction, towards the centre Right and a pragmatic, electoralist politics which will inevitably lead in my view towards an accommodation (probably after the next general election) with the merged Alliance. ●

Peter Hain

Evading The Issue

Unlike Peter Hain, I didn't find the joint statement by individuals from the Labour Co-ordinating Committee and Labour Left Liason 'unexceptional'. I found it depressing.

Labour has just suffered a third defeat in the polls. Despite a superb Labour election campaign, the Tories have a parliamentary majority of over 100. This time there are no excuses, no easy alibis.

Yet the statement suggests that the most important task now facing us is to paper over the cracks between the various factions on Labour's Left. In other words, having just suffered a massive defeat at the polls, the message

'The message seems to be "look inwards not outwards." Preoccupation with internal manoeuvring is part of Labour's problem, not a solution to its decline'

seems to be 'look inwards not outwards'. Such a preoccupation with internal manoeuvring is part of Labour's problem, not a solution for its decline.

The statement also reveals a paranoia which unfortunately is all too common on the Left and always acts as a substitute for real analysis. The ghost now stalking the Labour Party, it suggests, is a plot by Labour's Right to ensure a Labour-Liberal pact before the next election.

Yet there is no evidence of any substantial body of opinion on *any* wing of the Labour Party which favours such a deal.

And for a good reason: namely that the Labour Right *and* the Labour Left share a common party chauvinism rooted in labourism and the two-party system.

There is no evaluation of the pros and cons of a pact, needless to say. It is assumed to be a heresy. End of argument. This goes hand in hand with a *spectacular* underestimation

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of Thatcherism. There is no mention whatsoever of what is likely to come in the third term, of what it might mean, of where we are heading. And this is accompanied by the assumption that Thatcherism is just another right-wing phenomenon; the statement argues: 'A Labour-Liberal pact might appear to be an "anti-Thatcher coalition" but in practice it would be a coalition for perpetuating Thatcherism'. Thatcherism, the Labour Right, the Liberals, what's the difference? Really, this is stone-age stuff.

Of course, *if* you think like this, a pact *is* a nonsense. But if you see Thatcherism as a qualitatively different kind of threat, which it is, then that's another game altogether. Personally I want to see a Labour government elected at the next election. But I've got grave doubts as to whether Labour can recover sufficient ground in the time available. We are by now, after all, talking about *historic* shifts away from Labour – in the South, among sections of the working class and so forth. Given that, I am prepared at least to consider the merits and demerits of a pact. What characterises the statement is its lack of serious analysis, and this is accompanied by the inevitable absence of any strategic thinking worth the name.

Laid bare, the statement amounts to the following: The Labour Right (plus, it claims, *Marxism Today* by the way) is trying to stitch up a deal with the Liberals before the next election. A Labour-Liberal government would mark no break with Thatcherism. To forestall this, the various groups on Labour's Left must co-operate. They have the policies to beat the Labour Right, undermine Alliance support and get Labour elected next time round. What could be more simple?

This is an evasion of the underlying problem (which is not, by the way, to pact or not to pact). The real problem is how Labour renews its popular support. *No one* has the answer to that. After eight years of Thatcherism and four decades of Labour decline there clearly aren't any easy answers. Despite the sectarian tone of the appeal ('No one disputes the need to work with Labour's Centre Right. But co-operation must be in a framework where the Left leads the party and sets its agenda': George Galloway, Ken Livingstone, Ann Pettifor, *The Guardian* 24 August, 1987), the reality is that all sections of the Labour Party are confronted with the same problem, and solving it is not the special prerogative of any section. If the Left wants to 'lead' the party, it will have to earn the right. Judging by the statement, one can hardly be very optimistic about its ability to do so.

The statement implies that the Left already has the policies to do the job. Experience suggests differently. Labour has lost touch with millions of people that should be its natural supporters. They believe it cares, but it can't modernise. And the reason we have lost touch with them is because we are out of touch with what is happening in society and the economy. This is a problem no longer peculiar to Britain: we share it with most of the European Left.

Put like this, the statement is irrelevant to the problem, though harmful because it represents a diversion. There are now no excuses left for any of us.

As editor of *Marxism Today* I feel this acutely. The magazine has played an invaluable role in helping us to understand the new realities of the situation, the nature of Thatcherism and the parameters of the Left's crisis. But that in itself is inadequate. We need to move from critique to reconstruction. What is the long-term future of our society? How do we create a modern competitive economy? Around what issues can an anti-Tory majority be built? These are the questions the Left (in its broadest sense) needs to address. It won't be easy; in fact it's going to be bloody hard. But there is no alternative. That goes for us too. ●

Martin Jacques

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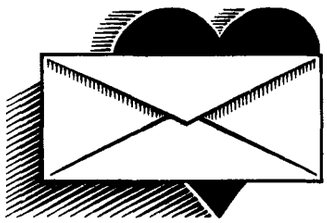

M·T HEARTS

For love, lust or laid-back companionship. To those according to their need. 50p per word. All entries run for two issues.

● **Gay male, mid-thirties,** Wiltshire, seeks new friends any area. Interests: theatre, literature, music. Penfriends considered but possibility of meetings preferred. No stereotypes or humourless ideologues. Box 101.

● **Recently bereaved,** retired male Socialist. Considerate non-smoker, politically active. Fond of travel. Tired of talking to my cat. Seeks loving female companion. Nationality/race unimportant. Box 102.

● **Young guy** seeks similar, Nth Staff. Box 103.

● **Divorced man,** attractive 39, graduate social sciences, own home. Interested books, politics. Seeks intelligent, sincere woman (25-40), for possible permanent relationship. Children welcome. S. West. Box 104.

● **Stimulus** (Intellectual and Physical) wanted by Gay Man (40, Vegetarian, Non-smoker) in Midlands. My interests are 'The Scene', Arts and Outdoors. Box 105.

● **Socialist male,** 29, sincere, easy-going, placid, non-sexist, tired of meeting the wrong people, seeks like-minded female. Box 106.

● **Woman**: physically robust, active; emotionally open, generous; intellectually intense, able; personally autonomous, independent. Seeks man: ditto. She; egalitarian; employed; ex-parent; ex-wife; 49; graduate; home/food/classical music/poetry lover; libertarian; mountain-walker; optimist; political (very); writer. And he? Box 107.

● **W/S Yorkshire man,** 31, writer, left-wing but not dogmatic, paralysed but still sane, still okay, own house/car, eater out, theatre-goer, seeks woman, 20-40. Photo please – will be returned. Box 108.

● **2 independent women,** 28, single-parents, seeks independent, socialist males 28-35 for friendship. Hertfordshire. Photo Box 109.

● **Attractive man 37.** Divorced, no ties. Graduate. Seeks intelligent female 25-35, for possible relationship. Children O.K. London/Bath. M4 corridor. Box 110.

● **Gay male (28),** left-wing bit of fluff. Has safety-pin, will travel (mainly London). Seeks others for safe fun. Photo apprec. Will return. Box 111.

● **Female:** 31, quiet yet humorous wide-ranging interests. Seeks company of intelligent, caring male. Birmingham/W.Midlands. Box 112.

● **Male, 39,** no ties, quiet but with an adventurous streak seeks lovely unconventional female. Interested arts, walking, travel. West Yorkshire. Box 113.

● **Male, 24,** non-macho, discerning yet inexperienced, dreams unfulfilled, politics Green, offers friendship/relationship to woman 19/29 in south-eastern Midlands. Box 114.

● **Happily married** bisexual female looking to re-discover her woman loving instincts after years of neglect, seeks similar for easy-going friendship/relationship/dalliance. No male involvement, just we two and the odd weekend away from it all. I am 39, fit and into books, walks, counselling, dining, dancing. Photo appreciated. Box 115.

● **Like to write?** Write to me, a West-German socialist female (24), wide-ranging interests and no prejudice. Box 116.

CONFERENCES

● **Need a venue** for your meeting/conference? Special rates for charities/educational groups. Comprehensive, economical facilities in WC1. Meeting rooms, catering and bars, audio-visual. Contact Amanda Rumley, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. 01-580 9551.

● **Italy: Popular culture conference.** TV, de-regulation, PCI, cinema, Eco, post-modernism... plus speakers from Italy. Reading University 23rd/24th October. For details: Mass Culture Conference, Dept of Italian Studies, Reading, RG6 2AA (tel: 0734 875123 ext. 348).

HOLIDAYS

● **Mountains Southern Spain.** Explore glorious countryside and moorish towns on bike, horse, minibus, train. Relax at converted watermill with pool. Molina del Santo, 29 Lordswood W Road, Southampton. 0703 768851.

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● **Women's Group Treks in Nepal.** Departures October, Xmas. SAE for details and 1988 Programme: Adventure Trekking, 40 Queens Park Court, Edinburgh, EH8 7DX.

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● **Interested in non-violence,** meditation, simple living, feminism? Mixed community seeks new members. Write to: Enquirers Secretary, Some Friends Community, Bethnal Green Road, London E2 6DG.

● **Clays Lane** is a large, multi-racial, single person housing co-op looking for new members. Welcome gays, heteros, lesbians and all creeds. Write: Membership Secretary c/o 11, Taylor Court, Clays Lane Housing Co-op, Clays Lane, Stratford, London E15 2EL, including S.A.E.

● **Comrade(m)** seeks accommodation in North London-Tottenham preferred, will consider most things with a reasonable rent. Box A010.

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● **Experienced journalist** seek work for lefty groups. Cheap rates for good, punchy copy. 041-632 6501.

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This new post starting early November, created for the development of Marxism Today's growing tradition of successful events, will be filled by an imaginative and enthusiastic applicant.

Aspects of the post include planning & budgeting an events schedule for the year, drafting proposals for, and coordinating events.

Relevant experience would be an advantage but is not essential.

The person appointed will be a member of the Marxism Today collective and as such will be expected to attend meetings outside normal office hours, as well as contributing to the monthly production of the magazine.

Salary £7,100 approx
Apply in writing to: **Personnel, Marxism Today, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY.**

Deadline for applications: **7th October**

Marxism Today will consider each applicant upon individual merit regardless of sex, race, nationality, age, sexual orientation, marital status, class or physical ability.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE OUTFITTERS

C.C.O. require a new Committee member to assist in the further implementation of its Plan.

Salary £7,100 approx

Starting late November
Deadline for applications **23 October 1987**
Write for job description & application form to:
Personnel, C.C.O., 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY.

Marxism Today require a

BUSINESS MANAGER

We are looking for someone with a high level of commitment to Marxism Today to take full responsibility for the business operation of the magazine.

This will involve helping to create a new business structure, developing and carrying through plans for expansion, keeping accounts and taking overall control of all business operations.

The ideal candidate should be well organised, enthusiastic and able to work creatively under pressure. S/he will also be required to play a central role in the magazine's collective structure. **Salary approx. £7,100 Deadline for applications: 10th November Jane Critchley 16 St John Street London EC1M 4AY.**

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M·T BOOKSHELVES

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British books, journals and pamphlets: fiction, languages (incl. EFL), politics, economics, social sciences, labour, trade union and peace movement. Literature, teaching aids, travel, art books, sheet music and records from the USSR and Eastern Europe. Folk records and songbooks. Political posters, badges, cards and T-Shirts.

● **Collets Penguin Bookshop,** 64-66 Charing Cross Rd, London WC2H 0BD. Tel: 01-836 6306. Most Penguins, Pelicans in print. Secondhand section. Social science, reference, travel, cookery books, the best of modern fiction from other publishers.

● **Collets Chinese Bookshop,** 40 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PJ. Tel: 01-580 7538.
Books in Chinese and English from and about China. Chinese language aids. Oriental art books. Traditional Chinese embroideries, antiques, prints, jewellery, porcelain and embroideries.

● **Bookmarks,** 265 Seven Sisters Rd, N4. North London's leading socialist bookshop. Two floors of good books and pamphlets.

● **Central Books,** 'Feature of the month' for October is 'Women': hundreds of secondhand books not displayed before on and by women. Many unusual titles. 37 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Nearest tube: Chancery Lane.

● **Books on Socialism** and labour movement. 2nd hand list available for s.a.e. from Northern Herald Books, c/o 6 Edmund St., Bradford 5.

● **For a list** of radical bookshops in Britain send s.a.e. to: **Federation of Radical Booksellers,** c/o Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, London, N1 9DX.

● **Key Books, Birmingham,** 136 Digbeth, B5 6DR, tel: 021 643 8081. Marxism, feminism, third world, black studies, non racist/sexist children's books, magazines. Mon-Sat 10.00-5.30. Moving in July.

● **In Other Words.** The Southwest's Alternative Community Bookshop, 72 Mutley Plain, Plymouth, PL4 6BF. Tel: 0752 663889.

● **Books for sale** – Labour history and socialism. Send S.A.E. for free second hand list to 137, Newton Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham B11 4PU.

● **Lesbian and Gay readers.** Send s.a.e. for booklists to Box MT, West & Wilde Bookshop, 25a Dundas Street, Edinburgh EH3 6QQ.

PUBLICATIONS

● **Worker co-operatives:** Information and book catalogue. SAE to Box A, ICOM Co-Publications, 8 Bradbury Street, London N16 8JN.

● **Primo Levi** – The Last Major Interview in PN Review 58. Available now. Single issue £2.50 (+50p P&P). Annual sub. (6 issues) £14.50. Write to: PN Review, Dept. C5, 208-212 Corn Exchange, Manchester M4 3BQ.

PUBLISHERS

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IN MEMORIAM

James Klugmann

Editor and Deputy Editor
Marxism Today
1957-1977
Died 14 Sept 1977
Remembered with affection.

MISCELLANEOUS

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Cultural politics, class, new left economic policy, CND and non-alignment, socialist humanism, artists and the new left.

Saturday 14th November,
10.00 - 6.00pm (Registration at 9.00am),
St Cross Building, St Cross Road, Oxford

Tickets: £5 (waged), £2 (students and unwaged)
For tickets and further information write to Seth Moglen, Holywell Manor, Manor Road, Oxford OX1 or ring 0865-244906 (make cheques payable to OU Socialist Discussion Group)

THERAPY

● **Therapy:** Psycho-politics? Psycho-analysis study group. Central London. Box T001.

● **Gestalt psychotherapy** group starting October, North London. Contact Mick Ellis 01-263 4778.

● **South London Network** for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Spaces for individuals/couples. Information from 01 673 2508 and on 01 672 9698.

EVENTS

● **"Salsa Township Mash Up"** Xanadu's Club, Upper Street, Islington. "Boycott South Africa NOT Nicaragua" Benefit. Proceeds to Sandinistas, ANC, SWAPO. Nov 3rd. 8.00pm-1.00am. £3.00/£2.00.

● **Psychopolitics For Socialists:** Marxist perspective on social oppression and individual repression. Ten Friday evenings. London course, starting September. Send s.a.e. for prospectus: Nigel Collingwood, 67 Heights Road, Upton, Poole, Dorset. (0202) 622869.

● **Roads to Freedom;** 3 miles fun run. 11am, Sunday 4th October, Heaton Park, Manchester. Medals for all finishers. Entry fee £2.50. Apply A.Adlem, 48 Princess Street, Manchester M1 6HR. Tel: 061 228 7998.

● **Communist Students 1st term Council;** Saturday 31st October, 11-7, Birmingham Star Club. Interested? Contact Mary (01 251 4406) for details.

MUSIC FOR THE MASSES

28/9/87

● **Public meeting on education.** Brian Simon speaks and answers questions at Public Library, Queens Avenue, Muswell Hill, N10. 8pm. Wed. Oct 14th. All welcome.

MARXISM TODAY EVENTS

For help and advice contact Marxism Today (Events) 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Same address if you want to be put in touch with your nearest readers group.

● **Ernesto Laclau:** 'Democracy and socialism; Politics for the 1990's'. The Red Rose Club. Seven Sisters Road, N7. October 21st, 7.30pm

● **MARXISM TODAY** is celebrating the 30th Anniversary of Publication with a very special evening of food and entertainment on Friday October 23rd 1987. If you would like to attend please write to MT30, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY; or phone 01 608 0265 by October 14th.

TUITION

● **Wanted:** school teaching French A-level for exchanges; write M. Barberousse, 4 rue C. Aubriet 51000 Chalons Sur Marne.

COURSES

● **A Women's History of London,** Introductory course. City University, Mondays 6.30-8.30pm. Starts 5th October. 01 278 3624.

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Further Enquiries and late copy: telephone Malcolm Clark 01-608 0265.
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Eric Hobsbawm in conversation

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CSE

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Political Economy of Militarism
Sat 21st Nov, Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7

Third World Debt
Sat 7th Nov, University of Leeds.
(Details H. Radice, Dept. of Economics, University of Leeds)

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Paddy Farrington worked on *Marxism Today* until recently and spent two years in Vietnam in the early 80s.
Simon Watney teaches at the Polytechnic of Central London and works for the Terrence Higgins Trust.
Derek Jarman is a film director.
Nicci Gerrard is a freelance writer.
Chris Savage King is a freelance writer.
Georgina Born lectures in communications at Brunel University and is an anthropologist and musician.
Anthony Barnett is writing a book on the Soviet Union.
Maggie Brown is the media editor of *The Independent*.
Brenda Polan is the women's page editor of *The Guardian*.
Robin Wilson is the editor of *Fortnight*.
Peter Hain is an executive member of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee.
Martin Jacques is the editor of *Marxism Today*.
Martin Kettle is a leader writer on *The Guardian*.

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Tony Benn

Tony Benn is finished. So runs the conventional political wisdom. The forces which he led in the Labour Party from 1971 to 1983 are scattered and vanquished. Benn himself cannot get elected to the shadow cabinet, and even his long-held supremacy as leader of the constituency activists on the party's executive is on the slide.

He may, as Gerald Kaufman once remarked, be one of the three most important Labour politicians of the last half century (along with Attlee and Wilson). But he is part of Labour's past, not of its present, still less its future.

The publication on October 5 of the first volume of Benn's political diaries only adds to that impression. A politician only publishes diaries at the end of a career, not midway through it. And the 660 pages covering the years 1963 to 1967 mark the start of a gargantuan published testimony from the man who has fought more parliamentary elections than any other current MP and who has more experience of cabinet office than the whole of the present shadow cabinet put together. Benn's diaries, on manuscript and cassette, are estimated to run to 8m words so far, utterly dwarfing Crossman and Castle both in completeness and accuracy. And that's not even counting the 40 manuscript volumes of his wartime diaries.

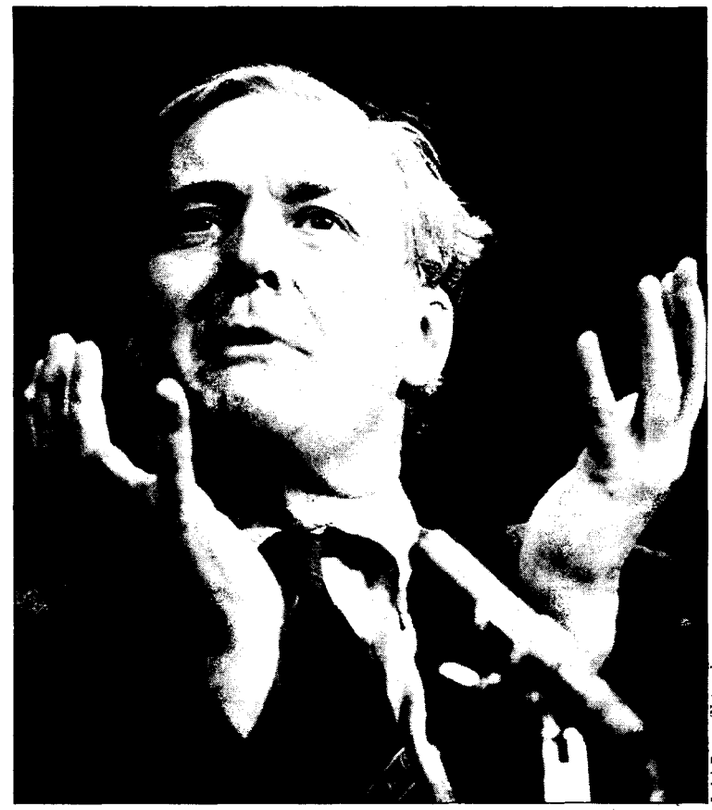
The Benn diaries will doubtless come as something of a surprise to those who can only remember him as the leader of the Labour Left in the last decade. They cover the days when he was best known as the man who had defied the rule that heirs to peerages could not renounce their titles and when, as paymaster general from 1964, then as minister for technology from 1966, he was as close as anyone to the heart and soul of the Wilson government. Students of British politics, Michael Foot wrote last year, sometimes forget that Tony Benn was once an up-and-coming, middle-of-the-road Labour MP with an excellent chance of becoming prime minister. Ouch!

Yet Tony Benn has not retired from politics. Four years ago, his beloved Bristol seat lost to the Tories, his chances of the Labour leadership finally gone, and in poor health, he might have done. But he was only 58 and, when the opportunity of fighting the Chesterfield by-election arose, nobody could have seized it with greater determination.

Now on October 24, Benn is a co-sponsor of a conference which some of his critics see as a launching-pad for a final challenge.The conference, in Chesterfield, is billed as an opportunity for a wide range of socialist opinion to challenge the march of the new Right. Last month, Benn described it as a chance for socialists 'to reaffirm values thrust aside by recent experience'. *The Times* reinterpreted that as 'a big push to capture the soul of the shell-shocked party'.

The Chesterfield conference will inevitably be seen by Fleet Street, by the Labour leadership and by many of the participants themselves as nothing more than an attempt to reorganise Labour's Left in opposition to the avowed revisionism of Neil Kinnock and Bryan Gould. It will undoubtedly be a gathering of – among others – fundamentalists, sectarians, opportunists and bruised egos. But it would probably be wrong to see it as a springboard for anything like a Benn leadership bid.

For the interesting fact is that – in his own way – Benn has been adopting a far more conciliatory tone lately. Launching the Chesterfield conference, he stated that there should be no negative return to old ideas. 'It is certainly not our idea to engage in name-calling or idle rhetoric, nor to set up a new Socialist Party, complete with its own candidates', he said.



Judah Passow/Network

Benn: still feared by Labour's leadership

In a recent article in *Campaign Group News*, Benn went even further. The Left, he wrote, should not make the mistake of engaging exclusively in an inner-party electoralism that puts campaigns for the leadership, on the national executive committee, or in parliament, above the issues that we think are important. It is the closest he has come to an outright repudiation of the tactics with which Labour's Bennites are most closely identified.

These statements have coincided with a period in which Benn's parliamentary skills seem to have been dusted off once again. He has made some of the most effective attacks on the government's attempts to ban Peter Wright's *Spycatcher* memoirs. It was Benn, too, who succeeded where Kinnock, Callaghan and Foot had all failed last January in rallying cross-party parliamentary support against the speaker's ban on the showing of Duncan Campbell's *Zircon* film. On his day, there is still no more impressive speaker in the Labour Party.

Yet, even if Benn is finally seeking some sort of rapprochement with the Labour leadership, he seems doomed to failure. No single member of the party other than Arthur Scargill is more feared by Neil Kinnock and his immediate supporters. Party managers believe that, however popular Benn is within the party, he remains deeply unpopular with the voters. Too much blood has been spilled in the Labour Party in the last eight years for there to be any prospect of a rehabilitation.

Benn's tragedy today is that he has exhausted his wider political credibility. He is a political giant doomed to the margins by his past. Scorned by the leadership, he has too great a sense of his own historical significance to allow himself to compromise beyond a certain point. But the unbridgeability of that gap is Labour's loss too. ●

Martin Kettle

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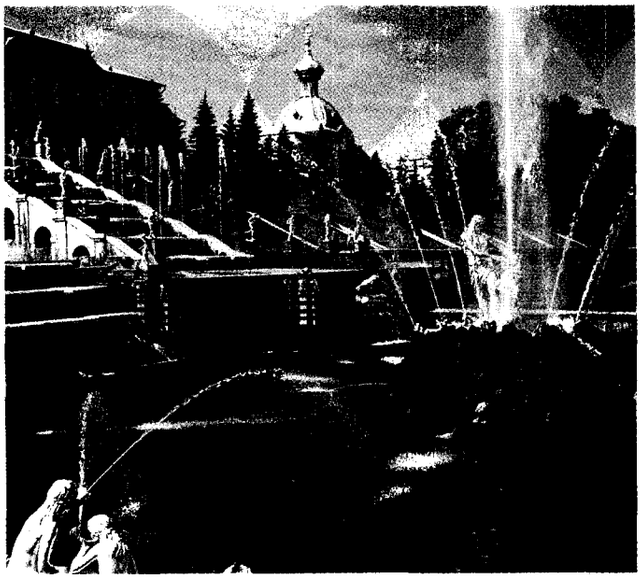

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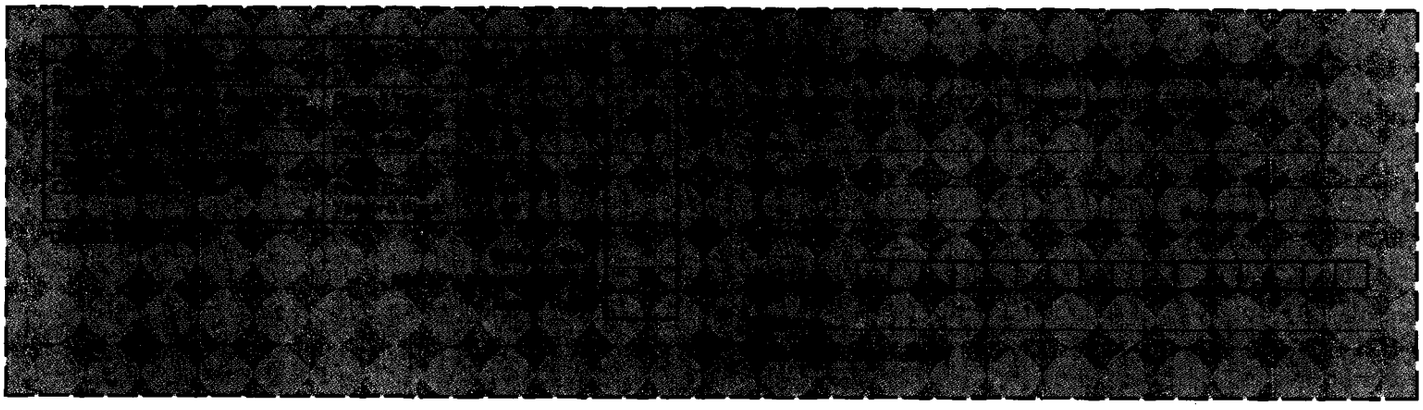

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